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## Introduction to Government and Politics

class="introduction"

In 2011,  
thousands of  
Yemeni  
citizens  
demonstrate  
d in the  
streets and  
protested  
political  
repression  
by their  
government  
(Photo  
courtesy of  
flickr)



The so-called "Arab Spring," which caught the world attention in 2011, was a series of political uprisings in several Islamic countries, including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Syria, Tunisia, Qatar, and Yemen. The extent of protest, which was said to be organized through social networking by ordinary citizens, varied widely among these countries. In some places, violent events took place. In Libya, its leader Muammar Gaddafi was assassinated, which was videotaped and broadcast. Backed by Russia, by contrast, Bashar Hafez al-Assad of Syria keeps weathering the revolution.

The U.S. major media outlets excitedly reported the "Arab Spring" in very much positive lens, calling it the democratic movements simultaneously widespread in these Islamic countries. The New York Times wrote, for example, "The light from the Arab Spring rose from the ground up" (2011).

Some scholars and journalists outside of the major media, however, suspect if this was actually led by ordinary citizens. Based upon a full of evidence, some of them point out that the Arab Spring was actually funded and

orchestrated by the CIA, State Department, and historic CIA-funded foundations (AhamedBensaada.com 2015). According to them, the U.S. goal was to replace the political leaders unfriendly to the U.S. with those functioning for U.S. corporate and foreign policy interests.

What the "Arab Spring" actually meant remains to be under the thick darkness. But at least, we need to pay attention also to the voice raised outside of the major media outlets that are (remember?) owned by a few economically and politically powerful people. THAT'S POLITICS!

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## Forms of Government

- Define common forms of government, such as monarchy, oligarchy, dictatorship, and democracy
- Compare common forms of government and identify real-life examples of each



The North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, a dictator?  
(Photo courtesy of flickr)

In this section discussed are "forms of government." They include: (1) anarchy, (2) monarchy, (3) oligarchy, (4) dictatorship, and (5) democracy. The distinction between oligarchy (government ruled by a few) and dictatorship (by a single person) is, in reality, not simple. Although Kim Jong-un of North Korea (shown above) is considered a dictator, for example, he is actually supported by a few knowledgeable people. Even Adolf Hitler of the Nazi Germany was supported by a few powerful members including military commanders, administrative leaders and Ministers of the Nazi Party.

Also, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between oligarchy and democracy (government based on the power entrusted by the people). As discussed below, indeed, many scholars consider the U.S. to be an oligarchy (ruled by a few super powerful elite, such as the ones who own [and

manipulate] all the major media outlets in the U.S. [see Ch. 10, Media and Technology]).

## Anarchy

The term **anarchy** has two different meanings, one of which is negative and the other, positive. The negative one indicates the politically chaotic situation in which no champion can govern the nation properly. Over the sovereignty of the nation, various forms of civil (or guerrilla) wars can popup here and there. As the police, just like the military, barely function, the entire nation looks like a lawless jungle. Many people, including children, flee from their own homelands (New York Times 2015). Such situations can be observed today in many countries, such as Sudan, Kenya, Syria, Somalia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and many, many more. In most cases, the chaotic situations can be seen as the product of colonialism or neocolonialism of these countries by powerful countries.

The positive one is a political philosophy that rejects parliamentary politics dominated by the elite. It's radically anti-authoritarian and sweetly utopian. Its roots, closely intertwined with socialism, can be traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century, or may be older. Its movements were crushed one after another, however, with the Paris Commune in 1871, suppressed in the United States after an anarchist shot President William McKinley in 1901, destroyed by Franco in the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930's and left to wither away with the 1960's student radicalism (New York Times 2000). Ideologically opposed to power and ambivalent about organization, anarchists perpetually live on the fringe of great movements. The quest for pure rebellion in some punk rock lyrics can be seen as an example of anarchism--anarchism without the utopian ideal, though.

## Monarchy

A **monarchy** is a government in which a single person (a monarch) rules until he/she dies or abdicates the throne. Closely related to the form of traditional authority, a monarch claims the rights to the title by way of hereditary succession or as a result of some sort of divine appointment. As mentioned above, the monarchies of most modern nations are ceremonial

remnants of tradition, and individuals who hold titles in such sovereignties are often aristocratic figureheads.

A few nations today, however, are run by governments wherein a monarch has absolute or unmitigated power. Such nations are called **absolute monarchies**. Although governments and regimes are constantly changing across the global landscape, it is generally safe to say that most modern absolute monarchies are concentrated in the Middle East and Africa. The small, oil-rich nation of Oman, for instance, is an example of an absolute monarchy. In this nation, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said has ruled since the 1970s. Recently, living conditions and opportunities for Oman's citizens have improved, but many citizens who live under the reign of an absolute ruler must contend with oppressive or unfair policies that are installed based on the unchecked whims or political agendas of that leader.

In today's global political climate, monarchies far more often take the form of **constitutional monarchies**, governments of nations that recognize monarchs but require these figures to abide by the laws of a greater constitution. Many countries that are now constitutional monarchies evolved from governments that were once considered absolute monarchies. In most cases, constitutional monarchies, such as Great Britain and Japan, feature elected prime ministers whose leadership role is far more involved and significant than that of its titled monarchs. In spite of their limited authority, monarchs endure in such governments because people enjoy their ceremonial significance and the pageantry of their rites.



Queen Noor of Jordan is the dowager queen of this constitutional monarchy and has limited political authority.

Queen Noor is American by birth, but relinquished her citizenship when she married. She is a noted global advocate for Arab-Western relations.

(Photo courtesy of Skoll World Forum/flickr)

## Oligarchy

The power in an **oligarchy** is held by a small, elite group. Unlike in a monarchy, members of an oligarchy do not necessarily achieve their statuses based on ties to noble ancestry. Rather, they may ascend to positions of power because of military might, economic power, or similar circumstances.

The concept of oligarchy is somewhat elusive; rarely does a society openly define itself as an oligarchy. Generally, the word carries negative connotations and conjures notions of a corrupt group whose members make unfair policy decisions in order to maintain their privileged positions. Many modern nations that claim to be democracies are really oligarchies. In fact, some prominent journalists, such as Paul Krugman, who won a Nobel laureate prize in economics, have labeled the United States an oligarchy, pointing to the influence of large corporations and Wall Street executives on U.S. policy (Krugman 2011). Other political analysts assert that all democracies are really just “elected oligarchies,” or systems in which citizens must vote for an individual who is part of a pool of candidates who come from the society’s elite ruling class (Winters 2011).

Oligarchies have existed throughout history, and today many consider Russia an example of oligarchic political structure. After the fall of

communism, groups of business owners captured control of this nation's natural resources and have used the opportunity to expand their wealth and political influence. Once an oligarchic power structure has been established, it can be very difficult for middle- and lower-class citizens to advance their socioeconomic status.

### **Is the United States an Oligarchy?**

Some scholars believe that the United States has now embarked on a gilded age, pointing out that the "400 wealthiest American families now own more than the 'lower' 150 million Americans put together" (Schultz 2011), and "the top 10% of earners took in more than half of the country's overall income in 2012, the highest proportion recorded in a century of government record keeping" (Lowery 2014).

Many of the super-rich use their economic clout to purchase more than luxury items; wealthy individuals and corporations are major political donors. Based on campaign finance reform legislation in 1971 and 2002, political campaign contributions were regulated and limited; however, the 2012 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Citizen's United versus the Federal Election Commission* repealed many of those restrictions. The Court ruled that contributions of corporations and unions to Political Action Committees (**PACs**) are a form of free speech that cannot be abridged and so cannot be limited or disclosed.

Opponents believe this is potentially a step in **oligarchy** in the United States; the ultra-wealthy and those who control the purse strings of large corporations and unions, in effect, are able to elect their candidate of choice through their unlimited spending power. Krugman (2011) says, "We have a society in which money is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few people, and in which that concentration of income and wealth threatens to make us a democracy in name only."

During the 2016 presidential election, by the end of August, just 10 mega donors contributed nearly 20% of the \$1.1 billion raised by super PACs (The Washington Post 2016). Although Lincoln's famous phrase "**of the people, by the people, for the people**" is at the heart of the U.S. system, Nobel-Prize winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz (2011) argues that in reality, it is "**of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%**." Inspired by this, a protest

movement called Occupy Wall Street (OWS) took place in 2011. The protesters claimed that "**We are 99%**," raising the issues of social and economic inequality and the perceived undue influence of corporations on government through super PACs.

## Dictatorship

Power in a **dictatorship** is held by a single person that wields complete and absolute authority over a government and population. Like some absolute monarchies, dictatorships may be corrupt and seek to limit or even eradicate the liberties of the general population. Dictators use a variety of means to perpetuate their authority. Economic and military might, as well as intimidation and brutality are often foremost among their tactics; individuals are less likely to rebel when they are starving and fearful. Many dictators start out as military leaders and are conditioned to the use of violence against opposition.

Some dictators also possess the personal appeal that Max Weber identified with a charismatic leader. Subjects of such a dictator may believe that the leader has special ability or authority and may be willing to submit to his or her authority. The late Kim Jong-Il, North Korean dictator, and his successor, Kim Jong-Un, exemplify this type of charismatic dictatorship.

Some dictatorships do not align themselves with any particular belief system or ideology; the goal of this type of regime is usually limited to preserving the authority of the dictator. A **totalitarian dictatorship** is even more oppressive and attempts to control all aspects of its subjects' lives; including occupation, religious beliefs, and number of children permitted in each family. Citizens may be forced to publicly demonstrate their faith in the regime by participating in marches and demonstrations.

Some "benevolent" dictators, such as Napoleon and Anwar Sadat, are credited with advancing their people's standard of living or exercising a moderate amount of evenhandedness. Others grossly abuse their power. Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Cambodia's Pol Pot, and Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, for instance, are heads of state who earned a reputation for leading through fear and intimidation.

## Democracy

A **democracy** is a form of government that strives to provide all citizens with an equal voice, or vote, in determining state policy, regardless of their level of socioeconomic status. Another important fundamental of the democratic state is the establishment and governance of a just and comprehensive constitution that delineates the roles and responsibilities of leaders and citizens alike.

Democracies, in general, ensure certain basic rights for their citizens. First and foremost, citizens are free to organize political parties and hold elections. Leaders, once elected, must abide by the terms of the given nation's constitution and are limited in the powers they can exercise, as well as in the length of the duration of their terms. Most democratic societies also champion freedom of individual speech, the press, and assembly, and they prohibit unlawful imprisonment. Of course, even in a democratic society, the government constrains citizens' total freedom to act however they wish. A democratically elected government does this by passing laws and writing regulations that, at least ideally, reflect the will of the majority of its people.

Although the United States champions the democratic ideology, it is not a “pure” democracy. In a purely democratic society, all citizens would vote on all proposed legislation, and this is not how laws are passed in the United States. There is a practical reason for this: a pure democracy would be hard to implement. Thus, the United States is a constitution-based federal republic in which citizens elect representatives to make policy decisions on their behalf. The term **representative democracy**, which is virtually synonymous with *republic*, can also be used to describe a government in which citizens elect representatives to promote policies that favor their interests. In the United States, representatives are elected at local and state levels, and the votes of the Electoral College determine who will hold the office of president. Each of the three branches of the U.S. government—the executive, judicial, and legislative—is held in check by the other branches.

## Summary

Nations are governed by different political systems, including monarchies, oligarchies, dictatorships, and democracies. Generally speaking, citizens of nations wherein power is concentrated in one leader or a small group are more likely to suffer violations of civil liberties and experience economic inequality. Many nations that are today organized around democratic ideals started out as monarchies or dictatorships but have evolved into more egalitarian systems. Democratic ideals, although hard to implement and achieve, promote basic human rights and justice for all citizens.

## Further Research

The Tea Party is among the highest-profile grassroots organizations active in U.S. politics today. What is its official platform? Examine the Tea Party website to find out more information at  
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## Glossary

**absolute monarchies**

governments wherein a monarch has absolute or unmitigated power

**anarchy**

the absence of any organized government

**constitutional monarchies**

national governments that recognize monarchs but require these figures to abide by the laws of a greater constitution

**democracy**

a form of government that provides all citizens with an equal voice or vote in determining state policy

**dictatorship**

a form of government in which a single person (or a very small group) wields complete and absolute authority over a government or populace

after the dictator rises to power, usually through economic or military might

monarchy

a form of government in which a single person (a monarch) rules until that individual dies or abdicates the throne

oligarchy

a form of government in which power is held by a small, elite group

representative democracy

a government wherein citizens elect officials to represent their interests

totalitarian dictatorship

an extremely oppressive form of dictatorship in which most aspects of citizens' lives are controlled by the leader

## Politics in the United States

- Explain the significance of “one person, one vote” in determining U.S. policy
- Discuss how voter participation affects politics in the United States
- Explore the influence of race, gender, and class issues on the voting process



Occupy Wall Street joined the NAACP as thousands marched in midtown Manhattan on December 10, 2011 to defend voting rights (Photo courtesy: Viewpointdaily).

## Voter Participation

Voter participation is essential to the success of the U.S. political system. However, in any given election year, roughly half the population does not vote (United States Elections Project 2010). Some years have seen even lower turnouts; in 2010, for instance, only 37.8% of the population participated in the electoral process (United States Elections Project 2011). Poor turnout can skew election results, particularly if one age or socioeconomic group is more diligent in its efforts to make it to the polls.

Thanks, maybe, to the so-called divided government under President Trump, however, the midterm elections in 2018 showed a bit different

picture--a record-breaking turnout. Despite long lines, broken machines, and bad weather in some locations, an estimated 113 million people participated, making this the first midterm in history to exceed over 100 million votes, with 49% of eligible voters participating in the election (CBS News 2018).

Democrats gained a net 27 seats in the House of Representatives, while Republicans expanded their majority by gaining a net two seats in the Senate. Democrats also flipped gubernatorial (governors') seats in seven states (*ibid.*). Well, with a very high turnout, Democrats won this, and Republicans won that... What does this mean? How do you predict if Trump will win in 2020? Let's see voters' attitudes and behaviors previously observed and think about voting issues by race, gender, and class.

## **Voting Issues by Race, Gender, and Class**

### **Race**

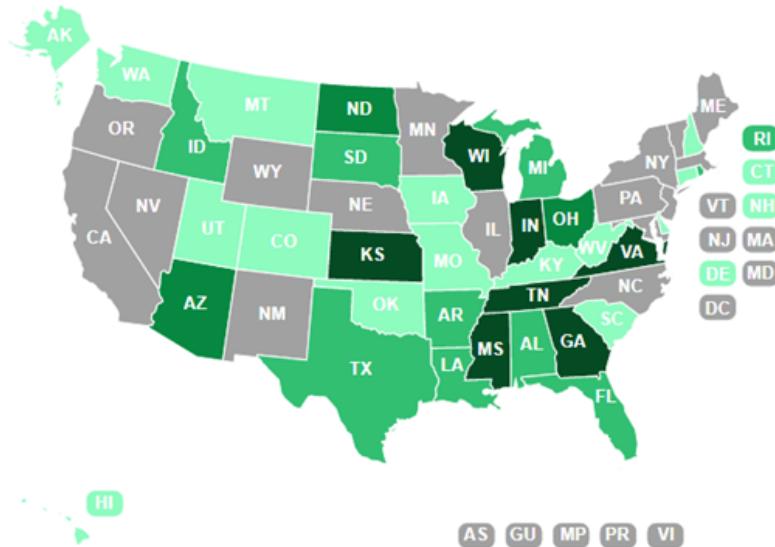
Although recent records have shown more minorities voting now than ever before, this trend is still fairly new. Historically, African Americans and other minorities have been underrepresented at the polls. Black men were not allowed to vote at all until after the Civil War, and black women gained the right to vote along with other women only with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Even after having become eligible voters, though, African Americans kept being discouraged by discriminatory legislation, passed in many states, which required poll taxes and literacy tests of prospective voters. In order to vote, that is, they had to pay money (between \$1 and \$2, or between \$7 and \$15 in 2013) and to demonstrate their ability to read and write. These requirements were not outlawed until the late 1960s.

Are they now free to vote? Not so fast. Still today, many states maintain laws quite disturbing to them, such as those that require potential voters to get voter IDs (see below).

### **Voter Identification Laws in Effect in 2018**

Strict Photo ID	Strict Non-Photo ID	Photo ID requested	ID requested; photo not required	No document required to vote



Source: NCSL 2018, "Voter Identification Requirements | Voter ID Laws."

A total of 34 states out of 50 maintain laws requesting or requiring voters to show some form of identification at the polls, all of which are in force in 2018 (NCSL 2018). The purpose of the laws is said to prevent voter fraud and make the voting system more secure. But such laws heavily discourage many, especially minorities, to use their own voting rights. Thus, many argue that this discouragement is the real purpose of the laws.

The laws require potential voters to spend extra time, energy, and money to get their voter IDs. In some areas, for example, the offices that issue IDs are open during limited hours (Washington Post 2012). In an extreme case, the office in Sauk City, Wis., runs only on the fifth Wednesday of any month. This office is thus open just a few days a year. Nearly half a million eligible voters in the 10 states do not have access to a vehicle and live more than 10 miles from their nearest state ID-issuing office. Voters who do not have their birth certificates or marriage licenses may have to pay additional costs (\$8-\$25 for a birth certificate; \$8-\$20 for a marriage license) because those documents are required to obtain a photo ID in some states. After all, many eligible voters--again, mostly minorities--give up their voting rights, saying, "Why bother?"

## **Gender**

Through long history of struggles, women won the suffrage (the voting right), first, in various states including New York in 1917, and then nationally in 1920. Evidence suggests, however, that the women's suffrage has not directly translated into equal voting power, yet. Indeed, although women are more likely than men to vote, men are way more likely than women to be in political office. Relative to their presence in the U.S. population, women--and racial/ethnic minorities--are still today underrepresented in the U.S. Congress.

## **Class**

Like race and gender, social class also influences voting practices. The tendency is: lower class people are less likely than middle class people to vote. Several reasons stand behind this tendency (Raymond 2010). First, it's difficult for workers in low-paying jobs to leave their workplaces to vote. Also, who would look after their children while they vote? As discussed above, furthermore, voter ID laws can discourage them. In addition, they can hardly believe their vote will count. In conclusion, very sad though, "Why bother?"

## **Summary**

The success and validity of U.S. democracy hinges on free, fair elections that are characterized by the support and participation of diverse citizens. In spite of their importance, elections have low participation. In the past, the voice of minority groups was nearly imperceptible in elections, but recent trends have shown increased voter turnout across many minority races and ethnicities. In the past, the creation and sustenance of a fair voting process has necessitated government intervention, particularly on the legislative level. The *Reynolds v. Sims* case, with its landmark "one person, one vote" ruling, is an excellent example of such action.

## **Further Research**

The 1965 Voting Rights Act was preceded by Lyndon Johnson's signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Both articles were instrumental in establishing equal rights for African Americans. Check out Cornell University's website

on this topic to learn more about this civil rights legislation:  
[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell\\_civil\\_rights](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cornell_civil_rights)

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## Glossary

**one person, one vote**

a concept holding that each person’s vote should be counted equally

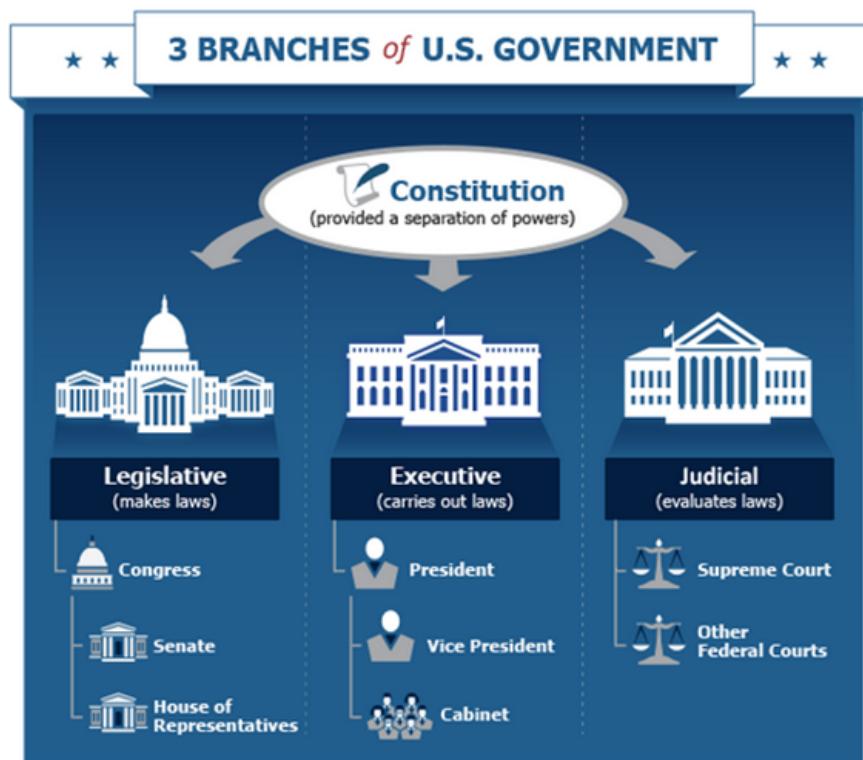
**politics**

a means of studying a nation’s or group’s underlying social norms as values as evidenced through its political structure and practices

## Power and Authority

- Define and differentiate between power and authority
- Identify and describe the three types of authority

Despite the differences between government systems in the Middle East and the United States, their governments play the same fundamental role: they exert control over the people they govern. The nature of that control—what we will define as power and authority—is an essential feature of politics.



Source: The U.S. Government <<https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government>>

For the most part, political scientists focus on how power is distributed in different areas of political systems. In the United States, the political power is divided into three branches, namely, **legislative**, **executive**, and **judicial** (see above). The main tasks of the branched are:

- The legislative branch (Congress) makes laws;
- The executive branch (Cabinet led by the President) carries out laws; and
- The judicial branch (Supreme Court) evaluates laws.

## What Is Power?



The G20 (or Group of Twenty) meeting at Osaka, Japan, 2019. (Photo courtesy of flickr)

Max Weber defined **power** as "the ability to impose one's own will upon others... unconditionally against other wills" (Weber 1922). This "unconditionally" means no matter what or even if others resist one's will. On the global level, for example, powerful nations rule weaker nations by force or huge financial loan, no matter what. That's power.

### Sword vs. Debt

The second U.S. president, John Adams, is credited with having said "There are two ways to conquer and enslave a nation. One is by sword [or force]. The other is by debt [huge financial loan]." Until World War II, powerful nations conquered weaker ones by force (sword), called colonialism. After WWII, for which colonialism can no longer be justified, powerful ones use

financial loan (debt) in more sophisticated fashion, which they themselves sweetly call "development assistance." In reality, though, it is called neocolonialism. Either way, power enables one to impose his/her will upon others, unconditionally against other wills.

## Neocolonialism

According to John Perkins (2004), the strategic order of neocolonialism, also called "corporatocracy," is as follows: (1) bribing top leaders of weaker countries to get help from them; (2) offering huge financial loan (debt); (3) using that money, renovating the weaker countries in many ways (infrastructure, military bases, privatization of public institutions); (4) sending agents of multinational corporations; (5) manipulating natural resources and exploiting cheap labor (slavery). When top leaders (such as Saddam Hussein) refuse to accept bribes, 3 steps can follow: (1) assassination, (2) coup d'état, and (3) invasion by force (war). Perkins suggests that what happened to Iraq in 2003 is a perfect example of this invasion by force.

John Perkins's interview is available on YouTube, titled "Confessions of an Economic Hitman - John Perkins | Short Documentary." It's about 26 minutes long. Watch it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWuAct1BxHU>.

## Public Opinions

The government power is based *after all* upon violence. Think about the police and the military, for example. By contrast, the power of non-governmental leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi, is based upon the number of people who support them. Recall the NAACP, for example (see below, too). Instead of violence, such leaders rely on a variety of nonviolent protest strategies such as rallies, sit-ins, marches, petitions, and boycotts.

What is the most important task for politicians to do? The answer is: to be elected, to be reelected, to be re-relected... Nothing is more important than this for them. In order to do so, they must be very careful about the trend of **public opinions**. Each one of us is powerless, for sure. But a collection of

our opinions, if not misled by the media, can be more powerful than a bunch of foxy politicians.

The Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which declared racial segregation in school to be unconstitutional, can be seen as a classical example of the power of collective voices. Prior to this decision, there had been steadily growing public pressure led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), by far the most important civil rights organization in the U.S. Its membership jumped from 50,000 in 1940 to 450,000 in 1946 (Patterson 2001). The NAACP, with only 800 branches in 1939, expanded to 14,000 branches by 1948. Eleven states and 28 cities in the North enacted laws between 1945 and 1951 that established Fair Employment Practices Commissions (FEPCs); 18 states approved legislation calling for the end of racial discrimination in public accommodations... This huge momentum eventually led the entire nation to the civil rights movement (1954-1968). (More will be discussed in Ch. 19, Social Movements and Social Change).

Millions of young people raised their voices at protests around the world on September 20, 2019 (NPR 2019). They demanded urgent action on climate change. Some of the first rallies began in Australia, and then spread from Pacific islands to India and Turkey and across Europe. In the U.S., more than 800 marches were planned. Who's the opinion leader? A 16-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg (see below), who was later chosen by the Time magazine as the person of the year, 2019.



Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old leader of a global protest against inaction on climate change, marched at a rally in New York City, Sept. 20, 2019. Around the world, millions joined her. (npr.org, Sept. 20, 2019)

## Misunderstanding and Understanding Terrorism

Referring terrorists, saying "They are crazy" is easy--which most people do--but it would never help us understand what's actually happening. In his book *Misunderstanding Terrorism* (2017), Dr. Marc Sageman, a veteran counterterrorism researcher and former CIA operations officer, argues that 16 years after 9/11, the war on terror still appears to have no end in sight, driven on by a circular logic of violence and retribution.

Sageman further argues that identity politics are also what fundamentally drives the terrorists themselves. U.S. government policies can consciously or inadvertently fuel a sense of conflict between different groups, in this case, Muslims and Westerners, or what sociologists call "out-group" and "in-group." Several government studies have pointed to politics as an igniter, rather than an extinguisher, of terrorism, finding U.S. foreign policy as the most frequently cited motivation.

Psychologist John Horgan (cited in "Understanding Terrorism" by DeAngelis 2009, p. 60; paraphrased) observes that terrorists rarely meet

psychiatric criteria for insanity, and that people who join terrorist recruitment tend to:

1. Feel angry but powerless in the current situation;
2. Identify with perceived victims of the social injustice;
3. Feel the need to take action;
4. Believe that engaging in violence against the state is not immoral;
5. Have friends or family sympathetic to the cause;
6. Believe that joining a movement offers a heightened sense of identity.

An international panel of leading experts on terrorism met in Oslo to discuss root causes of terrorism on the macro level (Bjørgo 2003).

According to the panel, there are a number of preconditions and precipitants for the emergence of various forms of terrorism. They include, among many others:

- Foreign domination through puppet regimes.
- Repression by foreign occupation.
- Illegitimate or corrupt governments.
- Rapid modernization
- Cycles of revenge.

Related to "cycles of revenge" above, a web news organization "The Intercept" (2016) critically wrote that U.S. media outlets love to dramatize and endlessly highlight Western victims of violence, while rendering almost completely invisible the victims of their own side's violence. Over the past several years, the U.S. has launched hideous civilian-slaughtering strikes in [the Middle East]. Recently, for example, Fighter jets from a U.S. coalition bombed a market in Yemen. About 120 people were killed, including more than 20 children.

In addition, according to McCartney et al. (2015), we have unmanned drones operated by remote control that can dispatch to kill people that the president and his team decide are our enemies (p. 86). The drone wars stated small, with occasional attacks to take out top-level commanders of Al Qaeda (p. 156). Obama's team escalated these wars to a peak of 132 attacks during 2010, and about 85 each in the next two years. By 2010, one high-

value target [a terrorist leader] was killed per 147 total deaths, a number way larger than those estimated by the U.S. government (see below).

### **United Nations condemns mounting casualties after intensive air campaigns (The Guardian 2017)**



Yemeni people carry coffins of people killed in airstrikes in Sana'a. Photograph: Xinhua/Barcroft Images

## **Types of Authority**

**Authority** refers to accepted power—that is, power that people agree to follow. People listen to authority figures because they feel that these individuals are worthy of respect. Generally speaking, people perceive the objectives and demands of an authority figure as reasonable and beneficial.

Besides formal offices, authority can arise from tradition and personal qualities. Max Weber realized this when he examined individual action as it relates to authority, as well as large-scale structures of authority and how they relate to a society's economy. Based on this work, Weber developed a classification system for authority. His three types of authority include

traditional authority, charismatic authority and legal-rational authority (Weber 1922).

	Traditional	Charismatic	Legal-Rational
Source of Power	A belief established (or forged) in ancient times	The person and people's faith in him/her	The people and their trust in the authority
Leadership Style	Ceremonial and/or self-willed	Often dictatorial but very well supported	The power resides in the position or the office, not in the person
Example	The king; the emperor	Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King, Jr.	U.S. presidency and Congress

### Weber's Three Types of Authority

#### Traditional Authority

According to Weber, the power of **traditional authority** is accepted because that has traditionally been the case; its legitimacy exists because it has been accepted for a long time. Britain's Queen Elizabeth, for instance, occupies a position that she inherited based on the traditional rules of succession for the monarchy. People adhere to traditional authority because

they are invested in the past and feel obligated to perpetuate it. In this type of authority, a ruler typically has no real force to carry out his will or maintain his position but depends primarily on a group's respect.

Traditional authority can be intertwined with race, class, and gender. In most societies, for instance, men are more likely to be privileged than women and thus are more likely to hold roles of authority. Similarly, members of dominant racial groups or upper-class families also win respect more readily. In the United States, the Kennedy family, which has produced many prominent politicians, exemplifies this model.

## Charismatic Authority

Followers accept the power of **charismatic authority** because they are drawn to the leader's personal qualities. The appeal of a charismatic leader can be extraordinary, and can inspire followers to make unusual sacrifices or to persevere in the midst of great hardship and persecution. Charismatic leaders usually emerge in times of crisis and offer innovative or radical solutions. They may even offer a vision of a new world order. Hitler's rise to power in the postwar economic depression of Germany is an example.

Charismatic leaders tend to hold power for short durations, and according to Weber, they are just as likely to be tyrannical as they are heroic. Diverse male leaders such as Hitler, Napoleon, Jesus Christ, César Chávez, Malcolm X, and Winston Churchill are all considered charismatic leaders. Because so few women have held dynamic positions of leadership throughout history, the list of charismatic female leaders is comparatively short. Many historians consider figures such as Joan of Arc, Margaret Thatcher, and Mother Teresa to be charismatic leaders.

## Legal-Rational Authority

According to Weber, power made legitimate by laws, written rules, and regulations is termed **legal-rational authority**. In this type of authority,

power is vested in a particular rationale, system, or ideology and not necessarily in the person who implements the specifics of that doctrine. A nation that follows a constitution applies this type of authority.

Of course, ideals are seldom replicated in the real world. Few governments or leaders can be neatly categorized. Some leaders, like Mohandas Gandhi, for instance, can be considered charismatic *and* legal-rational authority figures. Similarly, a leader or government can start out exemplifying one type of authority and gradually evolve or change into another type.

## Summary

Sociologists examine government and politics in terms of their impact on individuals and larger social systems. Power is an entity or individual's ability to control or direct others, while authority is influence that is predicated on perceived legitimacy. Max Weber studied power and authority, differentiating between the two concepts and formulating a system for classifying types of authority.

## Further Research

Want to learn more about sociologists at work in the real world? Read this blog posting to learn more about the roles sociology scholars played in the midst of the Arab Spring uprising:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology\\_Arab\\_Spring](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/sociology_Arab_Spring)

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## Glossary

### authority

power that people accept because it comes from a source that is perceived as legitimate

### charismatic authority

power legitimized on the basis of a leader's exceptional personal qualities

### patrimonialism

a type of authority wherein military and administrative factions enforce the power of the master

### power

the ability to exercise one's will over others

rational-legal authority

power that is legitimized by rules, regulations, and laws

traditional authority

power legitimized on the basis of long-standing customs

## Theoretical Perspectives on Government and Power

- Understand how functionalists, conflict theorists, and interactionists view government and politics

Sociologists rely on paradigms to make sense of their own studies. Each paradigm looks at the study of sociology through a distinct lens. The sociological examination of government and power can thus be evaluated using a variety of perspectives that help the evaluator gain a broader perspective. Functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism are widely recognized stances in practice today.

### **Functionalism**

According to functionalism, the government has four main purposes: planning and directing society, meeting social needs, maintaining law and order, and managing international relations.

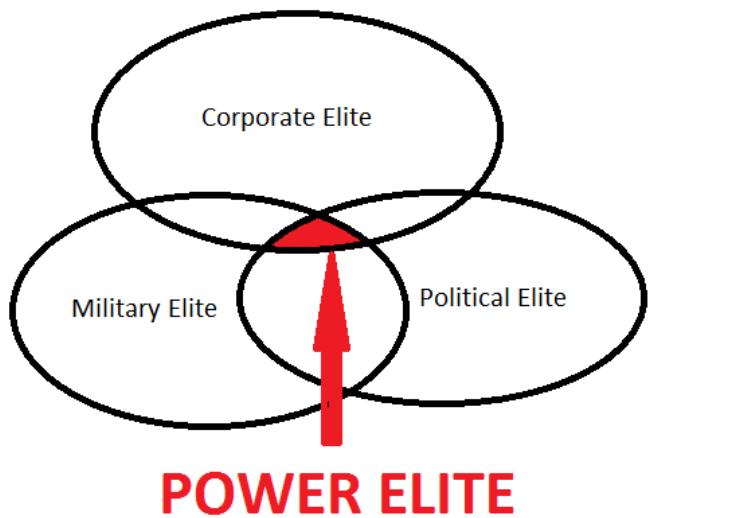
Functionalists view government and politics as a way to enforce norms and regulate conflict. Functionalists see active social change, such as the sit-in on Wall Street, as undesirable because it forces change and, as a result, undesirable things that might have to be compensated for. Functionalists seek consensus and order in society. Dysfunction creates social problems that lead to social change. For instance, functionalists would see monetary political contributions as a way of keeping people connected to the democratic process. This would be in opposition to a conflict theorist who would see this financial contribution as a way for the rich to perpetuate their own wealth.

### **Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory focuses on the social inequalities and power imbalance within society. Karl Marx was a seminal force in developing the conflict theory perspective; he viewed social structure, rather than individual personality characteristics, as the cause of many social problems, such as poverty and crime. Marx believed that conflict between groups struggling to

either attain wealth and power or keep the wealth and power was inevitable in a capitalist society.

### Power Elite--aka, the Military-Industrial Complex



C. Wright Mills (1956) elaborated on some of Marx's concepts, coining the phrase **power elite** to describe what he saw as the small group of powerful people who control much of the nation. The structure of power elite (also known as the military-industrial complex) consists of, as shown above, (1) corporate elite, (2) military elite, and (3) political elite. The same individuals move around these three sections to serve themselves, exchanging honorable positions (such as the president, the vice president, secretary of state, and so on), money (the U.S. government budget), and power (over not just the nation but also the entire world).

According to Mills, "the long-term trends of the power structure have been greatly speeded up since World War II" (ibid., p. 163). He suggests that "American capitalism is now in considerable part a military capitalism, and the most important relation of the big corporation to the state rests on the coincidence of interests between military and corporate needs, as defined by warlords and corporate rich."

The revolving-door system--i.e., the easy movement of high-ranking [government] officers into jobs with major defense contractors and the reverse movement of top executives in major defense contractors into high

Pentagon [or Congress] jobs--is solid evidence for the military-industrial complex in operation (McCartney et al. 2015).

More specifically, for example, Dick Cheney, the vice president under the George W. Bush administration, served as CEO of Halliburton, one of the largest defense contractors hired by the U.S. military during the U.S. wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan (McCartney et al. 2015). Similarly, before becoming Bush's national security advisor and secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice served on the board of Chevron, one of the world's largest oil companies. They led the U.S. to the war, and their companies made a lot of profits.

The U.S. government spent its budget for the wars, Homeland Security, nuclear weapons, veterans benefits, and various other defense-related expenses. To be more specific? Well, the defense-related expenses include the \$600 toilet seat, \$660 ashtrays, \$76,000 coffee makers, and \$74,000 ladders (McCartney et al. 2015). In addition to defense contractors who build weapons, the military today depends on service contractors who peel potatoes, serve meals, and do laundry for U.S. troops. As of 2013, DOD had 108,000 contract workers in Afghanistan, compared to 65,700 troops--1.6 contractors for each soldier.

Senator Bernie Sanders contends, saying, "We say to the Military Industrial Complex that we will not continue to spend \$700 billion a year on the military. We want and need a strong defense. But we do not have to spend more than the next 10 nations combined" (RealClear Politics 2019).

President Donald Trump recently displayed his critical attitude toward the military industrial complex, saying, "They [the military industrial complex] never want to leave, they always want to fight. No. I don't want to fight, but you do have situations like Iran. You can't let them have nuclear weapons. You just can't let that happen" (CNSNews 2019). On the other hand, before this interview, he nominated Patrick Shanahan, a former Boeing executive for his defense secretary. It may seem, then, that he actually wants to be included in what McCartney et al. (2015) call this "revolving-door system" as the boss.

## Conflict Theory in Action



Although military technology has evolved considerably over the course of history, the fundamental causes of conflict among nations remain essentially the same. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Even before there were modern nation-states, political conflicts arose among competing societies or factions of people. Vikings attacked continental European tribes in search of loot, and, later, European explorers landed on foreign shores to claim the resources of indigenous groups. Conflicts also arose among competing groups within individual sovereignties, as evidenced by the bloody French Revolution. Nearly all conflicts in the past and present, however, are spurred by basic desires: the drive to protect or gain territory and wealth, and the need to preserve liberty and autonomy.

According to sociologist and philosopher Karl Marx, such conflicts are necessary, although ugly, steps toward a more egalitarian society. Marx saw a historical pattern in which revolutionaries toppled elite power structures,

after which wealth and authority became more evenly dispersed among the population, and the overall social order advanced. In this pattern of change through conflict, people tend to gain greater personal freedom and economic stability (1848).

Modern-day conflicts are still driven by the desire to gain or protect power and wealth, whether in the form of land and resources or in the form of liberty and autonomy. Internally, groups within the U.S. struggle within the system, by trying to achieve the outcomes they prefer. Political differences over budget issues, for example, led to the recent shutdown of the federal government, and alternative political groups, such as the Tea Party, are gaining a significant following.

The Arab Spring exemplifies oppressed groups acting collectively to change their governmental systems, seeking both greater liberty and greater economic equity. Some nations, such as Tunisia, have successfully transitioned to governmental change; others, like Egypt, have not yet reached consensus on a new government.

Unfortunately, the change process in some countries reached the point of active combat between the established government and the portion of the population seeking change, often called revolutionaries or rebels. Libya and Syria are two such countries; the multifaceted nature of the conflict, with several groups competing for their own desired ends, makes creation of a peaceful resolution more challenging.

Popular uprisings of citizens seeking governmental change have occurred this year in Bosnia, Brazil, Greece, Iran, Jordan, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and most recently in Hong Kong. Although much smaller in size and scope, demonstrations took place in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, where people protested the local government's handling of a controversial shooting by the police.

The internal situation in the Ukraine is compounded by military aggression from neighboring Russia, which forcibly annexed the Crimean Peninsula, a geographic region of Ukraine, in early 2014 and threatens further military action in that area. This is an example of conflict driven by a desire to gain wealth and power in the form of land and resources. The United States and

the European Union are watching the developing crisis closely and have implemented economic sanctions against Russia.



What symbols of the Boston Tea Party are represented in this painting? How might a symbolic interactionist explain the way the modern-day Tea Party has reclaimed and repurposed these symbolic meanings? (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

## Symbolic Interactionism

Other sociologists study government and power by relying on the framework of symbolic interactionism, which is grounded in the works of Max Weber and George H. Mead.

Symbolic interactionism, as it pertains to government, focuses its attention on figures, emblems, or individuals that represent power and authority. Many diverse entities in larger society can be considered symbolic: trees, doves, wedding rings. Images that represent the power and authority of the United States include the White House, the eagle, and the American flag.

The Seal of the President of the United States, along with the office in general, incites respect and reverence in many Americans.

Symbolic interactionists are not interested in large structures such as the government. As micro-sociologists, they are more interested in the face-to-face aspects of politics. In reality, much of politics consists of face-to-face backroom meetings and lobbyist efforts. What the public often sees is the front porch of politics that is sanitized by the media through gatekeeping.

Symbolic interactionists are most interested in the interaction between these small groups who make decisions, or in the case of some recent congressional committees, demonstrate the inability to make any decisions at all. The heart of politics is the result of interaction between individuals and small groups over periods of time. These meetings produce new meanings and perspectives that individuals use to make sure there are future interactions.

## Summary

Sociologists use frameworks to gain perspective on data and observations related to the study of power and government. Functionalism suggests that societal power and structure is predicated on cooperation, interdependence, and shared goals or values. Conflict theory, rooted in Marxism, asserts that societal structures are the result of social groups competing for wealth and influence. Symbolic interactionism examines a smaller realm of sociological interest: the individual's perception of symbols of power and their subsequent reaction to the face-to-face interactions of the political realm.

## Further Research

Functionalism is a complex philosophical theory that pertains to a variety of disciplines beyond sociology. Visit the entry devoted to this intriguing topic on Stanford University's *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* for a more comprehensive overview:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford\\_functionalism](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford_functionalism)

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## Glossary

### power elite

a small group of powerful people who control much of a society

## Introduction to Work and the Economy

class="introduction"

Today,  
structural  
mobility (the  
economic  
condition of  
the whole  
society) is  
determined,  
in great part,  
by stock  
prices,  
among other  
factors.

(Photo  
courtesy of  
pixabay.com  
)



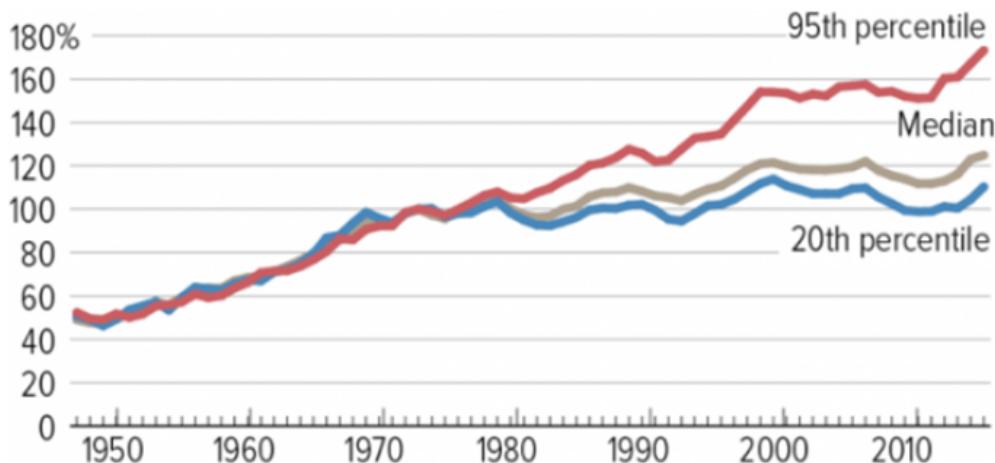
**Economy** refers to the system of producing and distributing food, goods, and services. Even people in ancient times had "some process of production, consequently, an economy, which just as much constituted *the material basis* of their world, as bourgeois [capitalist] economy constitutes that of our modern world" (Marx 1867/1990). Throughout human history, the mode of economy, the very basic of the social condition, has been shifting from hunting and gathering to horticultural and pastoral, to agricultural, to industrial, and to postindustrial. As the mode of economy (or the material basis of the society) shifts, what people do and how they think cannot remain the same. (More about the mode of economy will be discussed later.)

Called "Primitive Communism," in the economic condition of hunting and gathering societies--according to Marx, Engels, and many other scholars--there was no inequality; the members maintained egalitarian social relations and common ownership, as opposed to personal properties. But as humans began producing food artificially by domesticating animals and plants, they became capable of producing more food than they consumed ("surplus food"). This condition helped yield personal properties, which had not existed in hunting and gathering societies, and because of which inequality

began growing, and, on the other hand, primitive communism began disappearing. Afterward? See below.

## The Wage Gap in the United States

### The Nonstop Growth of the Gap between the Poor and the Rich since 1981



Source: CBPP calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau Data

## Overall

Census family income data show that from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, incomes across the income distribution grew at nearly the same pace (CBPP 2017). The figure above shows the level of real (inflation-adjusted) income at several points on the distribution relative to its 1973 level. It shows that real family income roughly doubled from the late 1940s to the early 1970s at the 95th percentile (the level of income of the top 5%), at the median (the level of income placed in the middle in the data), and at the 20th percentile (the level of income of the bottom 20%). Then, beginning in the 1970s, income disparities began to widen, with income growing much faster at the top of the ladder than in the middle or bottom.

Especially notable in the figure is the nonstop growth of the gap between the poor and the rich after 1981, in which Ronald Reagan, a republican U.S. President, began lowering the tax rates for the rich significantly and, on the other hand, decided never to raise the minimum wage. Since then, millionaires were becoming billionaires, and the poor were left out

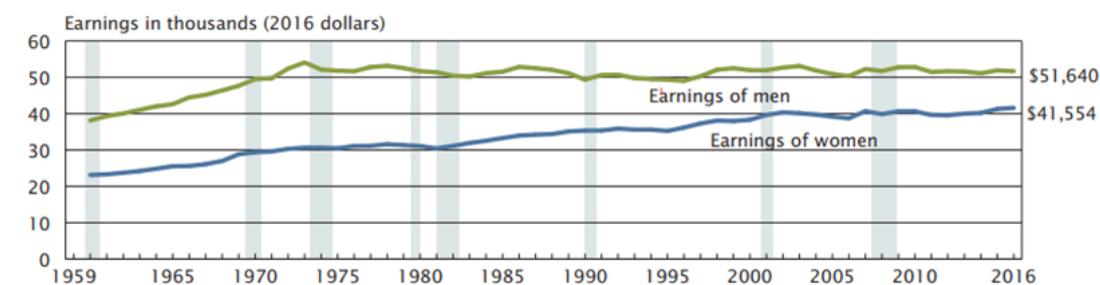
throughout. This trend kept growing regardless of who the president was. In 1993, Bill Clinton became the president, in 2001, George W. Bush, and in 2009, Barack Obama... See? The gap kept growing, regardless of whether the president was a democrat or republican.

## Gender

The Equal Pay Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1963, was designed to reduce the wage gap between men and women, but this law is not working at all (see above). The act in essence required employers to pay equal wages to men and women for similar jobs. However, more than fifty years later, women continue to make less money than their male counterparts.

According to a report released by the White House (National Equal Pay Taskforce 2013), "On average, full-time working women make just 77 cents for every dollar a man makes." In 2016, the gap between men and women in their median income was \$10,096 (\$51,640 minus \$41,554). Oh yeah? Pretty much good income... Don't be jealous; they are full-timers having worked for 15 years or longer (see the title of the figure).

### Median Earnings of Full-Time Workers 15 Years and Older by Sex: 1960 to 2016



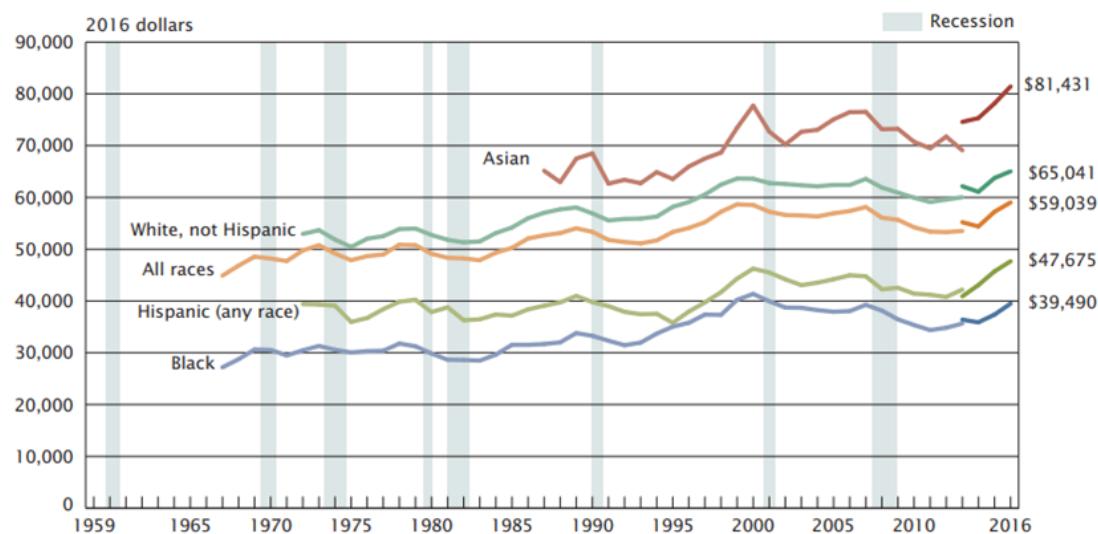
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1961 to 2017 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

## Race and Ethnicity

A comparison of income by race shows that Asian American households earn more than any other races including whites; this seems to be related, in part, to their education level. All other differences between races may also have resulted from this factor--plus "institutional racism" (see Ch. 7, Race and Ethnicity). The vertically drawn gray zones in the figure represent "recession." In each zone, the income levels for all races went down. The thick gray zone drawn between 2005 and 2010 is called the Great Recession that heavily damaged income of all races. In 2016, having recovered from

this, the median household income for all races went up to \$59,039. Oh, don't be jealous; this is "household" income, not personal income. Still? Oh, yeah...

## Real Median Household Income by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1967 to 2016



## Recent Economic Cconditions

In 2016, as shown above, the United States continued its recovery from the **Great Recession**, arguably the worst economic downturn since the stock market collapse in 1929 and the Great Depression that ensued. What caused this recession?

The recent recession was brought on, at least in part, by the lending practices of the early twenty-first century, known as **subprime loan**. During this time, banks offered adjustable-rate mortgages (ARM) to customers with poor credit histories for their purchase of houses at an attractively low introductory rate. After the introductory rate expired, the interest rate on these ARM loans rose, often dramatically, creating a sizable increase in the borrower's monthly mortgage payments. As their rates adjusted upward, many of these "subprime loan" customers became unable to make their monthly payments and stopped doing so, known as defaulting. They gave up their houses, which banks confiscated and happily used for another

loans. Many, many banks repeated this. The massive rate of loan defaults, however, eventually put a strain on the financial institutions that had made the loans, and the inflated house-price bubble burst. What followed this was a series of bankruptcies of big financial institutions, such as Lehman Brothers.

As a terrible result, the United States, and the entire world too, fell into a period of high and prolonged unemployment, extreme reductions in wealth, stagnant wages, and loss of value in personal property (houses and land). The S&P 500 Index, which measures the overall share value of selected leading companies whose shares are traded on the stock market, fell from a high of 1565 in October 2007 to 676 by March 2009. Senator Bernie Sanders fiercely contends, "The reality is fraud in the business model of Wall Street... destroying the very fabric of our nation" (New York Times 2016).

### **The Economic Indicators**

There are several economic indicators with which to measure the economic condition. They include unemployment rates, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), housing values, the stock market, and so on. To these economic indicators, another indicator was added in the end of the 1960s called **consumer confidence index**, owing to studies of a psychologist--not an economist.

It was Psychologist George Katona who developed the consumer confidence index. It measures "the degree of optimism on the state of the economy that consumers are expressing through their activities of savings and spending" (Katona 1951; cited in Lavrakas 2008). Using his own index, Katona became one of the few who accurately predicted the post-war boom in the U.S. Recall Thomas Theorem that suggests, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (see Ch. 5, Society and Social Interaction). The economy is a social reality, and social realities are, to a great extent, the product of people's subjective views on reality. Even if their views are wrong, they can become real in their consequences. Contrary to Katona's prediction, the mainstream economists right after World War II mistakenly warned that the economy would pit the bottom. People didn't care about this chilling analysis, and kept spending their

money, believing that "Thank God, it's good economy, and this will continue!" What Katona measured was this.

Today, having recovered from the Great Recession, unemployment rates are down in many areas of the United States, and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), housing prices, and the stock market are all up. This does not mean, however, that everybody enjoys this recovered economy in the same way. Many are, indeed, still struggling. Today, wealth is distributed inequitably at the top. Corporate profits have increased more than 141%, and CEO pay has risen by more than 298%.

The economic downturn had a rippling effect throughout the economy. For instance, it delivered a significant blow to the once-vibrant U.S. automotive industry. While consumers found loans harder to get due to the subprime mortgage lending crisis and increasing fuel costs, they also grew weary of large, gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles (SUVs) that were once the bread-and-butter product of U.S. automakers. As customers became more aware of the environmental impact of such cars and the cost of fuel, the large SUV ceased to be the status symbol it had been during the 1990s and 2000s. It became instead a symbol of excess and waste. All these factors created the perfect storm that nearly decimated the U.S. auto industry. To prevent mass job loss, the government provided emergency loans funded by taxpayer dollars, as well as other forms of financial support, to corporations like General Motors and Chrysler. While the companies survived, the landscape of the U.S. auto industry was changed as result of the economic decline.

To realign their businesses in the face of decreased sales and lower manufacturing outputs, many large automotive companies severed their ties with hundreds of dealerships, which affected the dealers' local economies around the country.

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## Glossary

### economy

the social institution through which a society's resources (goods and services) are managed

### mechanical solidarity

a form of social cohesion that comes from sharing similar work, education, and religion, as might be found in simpler societies

### organic solidarity

a form of social cohesion that arises out of the mutual interdependence created by the specialization of work

## Economic Systems

- Understand types of economic systems and their historical development
- Describe capitalism and socialism both in theory and in practice
- Discussion how functionalists, conflict theorists, and symbolic interactionists view the economy and work

The dominant economic systems of the modern era are capitalism and socialism (whose main characteristics will be compared below), but there have been many variations of economic sectors or modes. Many of these earlier systems lasted centuries--or even thousands of years. They include:

- Hunting and gathering;
- Horticultural and pastoral;
- Agricultural;
- Industrial; and
- Postindustrial.

The last three are also called, respectively, the primary sector (agricultural), the secondary sector (industrial), and the tertiary sector (postindustrial), as shown below. In the end of the twentieth century, one more sector has been added as the growth of the Internet helped create new forms of businesses based upon ideas and knowledge, namely, the quaternary sector.

## **Economic Sector (or Mode of Economy)**



Primary sector (natural resources, e.g., food)



Secondary sector (manufacturing goods)



Tertiary sector (services, e.g., banking, insurance)



Quaternary sector (ideas and knowledge)

## Economics of Agricultural, Industrial, and Postindustrial Societies

Our earliest ancestors lived as hunter-gatherers. Small groups of extended families roamed from place to place looking for food. They hunted animals for their meat and gathered wild fruits, vegetables, and cereals. Once the resources of an area ran low, the group had to move on, and everything they owned had to travel with them. Food reserves only consisted of what they could carry. Many sociologists contend that hunter-gatherers did not have a true economy, because groups did not typically trade with other groups due to the scarcity of goods.

### Agricultural Societies

The first true economies emerged when people started raising crops and domesticating animals. It is important to note that agriculture began independently and at different times in several places around the world. The

earliest agriculture was in the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East around 11,000–10,000 years ago. Next were the valleys of the Indus, Yangtze, and Yellow rivers in India and China, between 10,000 and 9,000 years ago. The people living in the highlands of New Guinea developed agriculture between 9,000 and 6,000 years ago, while people were farming in Sub-Saharan Africa between 5,000 and 4,000 years ago. Agriculture developed later in the western hemisphere, arising in what would become the eastern United States, central Mexico, and northern South America between 5,000 and 3,000 years ago (Diamond 2003).

Agriculture began with the simplest of technologies—for example, a pointed stick to break up the soil—but really took off when people harnessed animals to pull an even more efficient tool for the same task: the plow. With this new technology, the way our ancestors produced food became more efficient. Surplus food grew, and so did the size of the society.

The improved efficiency in food production meant that not everyone had to toil all day in the fields. As agriculture grew, new jobs emerged, along with new technologies. Excess crops needed to be stored, processed, protected, and transported. Farming equipment and irrigation systems needed to be built and maintained. Wild animals needed to be domesticated and herds shepherded. Economies begin to develop because people now had goods and services to trade. At the same time, farmers eventually came to labor for the ruling class.

As more people specialized in nonfarming jobs, villages grew into towns and then into cities. Urban areas created the need for administrators and public servants. Disputes over ownership, payments, debts, compensation for damages, and the like led to the need for laws and courts—and the judges, clerks, lawyers, and police who administered and enforced those laws.

At first, most goods and services were traded as gifts or through bartering between small social groups (Mauss 1922). Exchanging one form of goods or services for another was known as **bartering**. This system only works when one person happens to have something the other person needs at the same time. To solve this problem, people developed the idea of a means of exchange that could be used at any time: that is, money. **Money** refers to an

object that a society agrees to assign a value to so it can be exchanged for payment. In early economies, money was often objects like cowry shells, rice, barley, or even rum. Precious metals quickly became the preferred means of exchange in many cultures because of their durability and portability. The first coins were minted in Lydia in what is now Turkey around 650–600 B.C.E. (Goldsborough 2010). Early legal codes established the value of money and the rates of exchange for various commodities. They also established the rules for inheritance, fines as penalties for crimes, and how property was to be divided and taxed (Horne 1915). A symbolic interactionist would note that bartering and money are systems of symbolic exchange. Monetary objects took on a symbolic meaning, one that carries into our modern-day use of cash, checks, and debit cards.

As city-states grew into countries and countries grew into empires, their economies grew as well. When large empires broke up, their economies broke up too. The governments of newly formed nations sought to protect and increase their markets. They financed voyages of discovery to find new markets and resources all over the world, which ushered in a rapid progression of economic development.

Colonies were established to secure these markets, and wars were financed to take over territory. These ventures were funded in part by raising capital from investors who were paid back from the goods obtained. Governments and private citizens also set up large trading companies that financed their enterprises around the world by selling stocks and bonds.

Governments tried to protect their share of the markets by developing a system called mercantilism. **Mercantilism** is an economic policy based on accumulating silver and gold by controlling colonial and foreign markets through taxes and other charges. The resulting restrictive practices and exacting demands included monopolies, bans on certain goods, high tariffs, and exclusivity requirements. Mercantilistic governments also promoted manufacturing and, with the ability to fund technological improvements, they helped create the equipment that led to the Industrial Revolution.

## Industrial Societies

Until the end of the eighteenth century, most manufacturing was done by manual labor. This changed as inventors devised machines to manufacture goods. A small number of innovations led to a large number of changes in the British economy. In the textile industries, the spinning of cotton, worsted yarn, and flax could be done more quickly and less expensively using new machines with names like the Spinning Jenny and the Spinning Mule (Bond 2003). Another important innovation was made in the production of iron: Coke from coal could now be used in all stages of smelting rather than charcoal from wood, which dramatically lowered the cost of iron production while increasing availability (Bond 2003). James Watt ushered in what many scholars recognize as the greatest change, revolutionizing transportation and thereby the entire production of goods with his improved steam engine.

As people moved to cities to fill factory jobs, factory production also changed. Workers did their jobs in assembly lines and were trained to complete only one or two steps in the manufacturing process. These advances meant that more finished goods could be manufactured with more efficiency and speed than ever before.

The Industrial Revolution also changed agricultural practices. Until that time, many people practiced **subsistence farming** in which they produced only enough to feed themselves and pay their taxes. New technology introduced gasoline-powered farm tools such as tractors, seed drills, threshers, and combine harvesters. Farmers were encouraged to plant large fields of a single crop to maximize profits. With improved transportation and the invention of refrigeration, produce could be shipped safely all over the world.

The Industrial Revolution modernized the world. With growing resources came growing societies and economies. Between 1800 and 2000, the world's population grew sixfold, while per capita income saw a tenfold jump (Maddison 2003).

While many people's lives were improving, the Industrial Revolution also birthed many societal problems. There were inequalities in the system. Owners amassed vast fortunes while laborers, including young children, toiled for long hours in unsafe conditions. Workers' rights, wage protection,

and safe work environments are issues that arose during this period and remain concerns today.

## Postindustrial Societies

Postindustrial societies, also known as information societies, have evolved in modernized nations. One of the most valuable goods of the modern era is information. Those who have the means to produce, store, and disseminate information are leaders in this type of society.

One way scholars understand the development of different types of societies (like agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial) is by examining their economies in terms of four sectors: primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary. Each has a different focus. The primary sector extracts and produces raw materials (like metals and crops). The secondary sector turns those raw materials into finished goods. The tertiary sector provides services: child care, healthcare, and money management. Finally, the quaternary sector produces ideas; these include the research that leads to new technologies, the management of information, and a society's highest levels of education and the arts (Kenessey 1987).

In underdeveloped countries, the majority of the people work in the primary sector. As economies develop, more and more people are employed in the secondary sector. In well-developed economies, such as those in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe, the majority of the workforce is employed in service industries. In the United States, for example, almost 80 percent of the workforce is employed in the tertiary sector (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).

The rapid increase in computer use in all aspects of daily life is a main reason for the transition to an information economy. Fewer people are needed to work in factories because computerized robots now handle many of the tasks. Other manufacturing jobs have been outsourced to less-developed countries as a result of the developing global economy. The growth of the Internet has created industries that exist almost entirely online. Within industries, technology continues to change how goods are

produced. For instance, the music and film industries used to produce physical products like CDs and DVDs for distribution. Now those goods are increasingly produced digitally and streamed or downloaded at a much lower physical manufacturing cost. Information and the means to use it creatively have become commodities in a postindustrial economy.

## Capitalism vs. Socialism

When we compare capitalism and socialism, we need to be aware that we are comparing the concepts, not the contexts. **Concepts** are abstract ideas and **contexts**, tangible realities actually going on in front of our eyes. Although realities tend to grab our attention more powerfully, as they are made up of many noises other than pure concepts, we may be misled by them.

Here is an example of the difference between concepts and contexts. Assume you and some of your friends are interested in performing, say, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. So you guys group an orchestra, practice the symphony, and perform it at the BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center. But, just as predicted by many people, the way your orchestra performs is terrible. Now can your audience say, "Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 is terrible"? In this example, the symphony is a concept (the idea created by Beethoven), and your orchestra's performance is the context (the reality going on in the eye of your audience).

Hence, when we compare capitalism and socialism (the concepts), what's going on in the U.S. or that in China (the contexts) should be treated mostly as noises, not as pure ideas.

As shown below, the differences between capitalism and socialism can be summarized through the 3 major characteristics: (1) the ownership of the means of production, (2) who plans the economy, and (3) the main purpose of the economy. These are followed by examples of capitalism and socialism below.

<b>3 Major Characteristics</b>	<b>Capitalism</b>	<b>Socialism</b>
<b>Ownership of the means of production</b>	Private individuals	Government (public)
<b>Who plans the economy</b>	<i>Laissez-faire</i> (no one)-"free economy" under competition	Government--"planned economy" under cooperation
<b>Main purpose</b>	Profit	Welfare

Capitalism vs Socialism, by the 3 Major Characteristics

### Examples

- **Capitalism:** entrepreneurship (running one's own business); giant corporations; privatization of prisons; deregulation of rail, truck, and air transportation; free trade accord (NAFTA, TPP...); globalization...
- **Socialism:** New Deal Policy; public schools; progressive taxation; labor unions; minimum wages; medicare, medicaid; consumer protection laws (FDA, FTC)...

### Capitalism



There are several key words to understand what capitalism is like, at the top of which placed is "SUCCESS."  
(Courtesy of pixabay.com)

**Capitalism** is an economic system based on private ownership of the means of production, free economy, and profit motives. In principle, the government has nothing to do with this system. There's no regulation on any economic activities and protection for consumers. In reality, though, there's no country with 100% pure capitalism. Even the United States, which is considered the most capitalistic country, has many socialist policies, such as minimum wages, labor unions, public schools, medicare and medicaid, consumer protection laws, and so on.

Capitalism grew together with democracy as feudalism, based on aristocracy (or kingdom), lost its power for the raging waves of the Industrial Revolution. Prior to that, though, there had been political and philosophical thoughts that conceived this system. Among others, as aforementioned, Max Weber pointed to the Protestant work ethic that led to the spirit of capitalism.

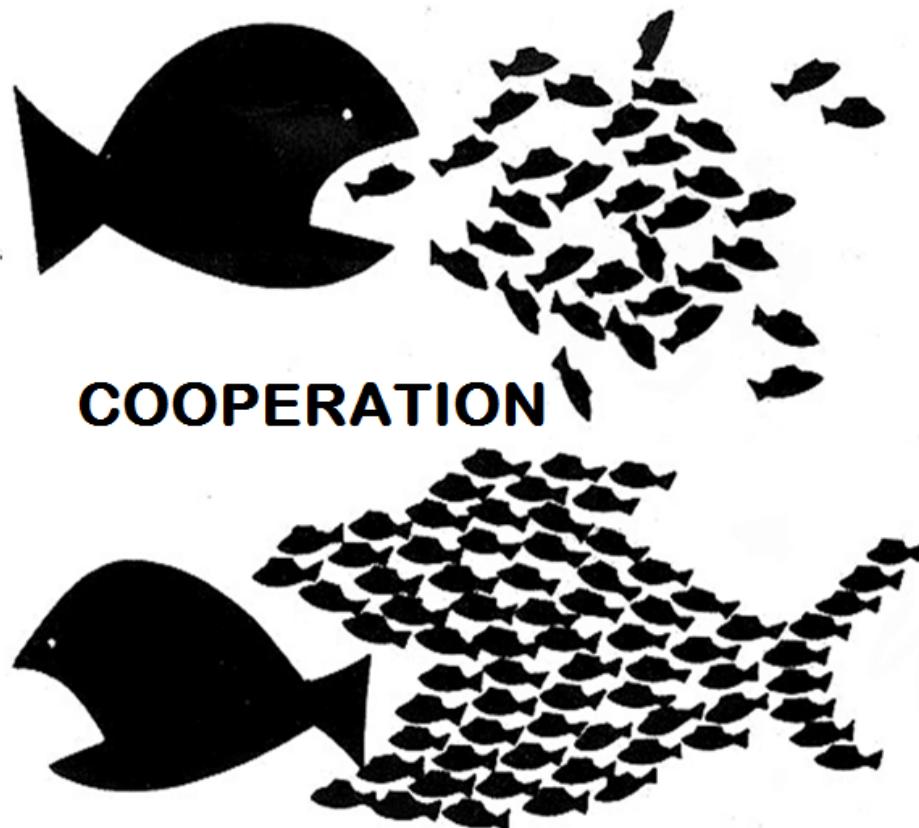
Equally important is the theory of the **invisible hand** offered by Adam Smith, a leading theorist of capitalism. He suggested that by pursuing your own interest, you frequently promote the society's interest more effectively, led by the invisible hand, than when you really intend to promote it (1976

[1776], pp. 363-64; paraphrased). By "invisible hand" (aka *laissez-faire*), he meant the economic mechanism based on "free competition" that automatically maintains the economic health without the government intervention. For a given product, that is, as a plural number of companies compete with each other, its quality should become better, and its price should become cheaper. This competition is for self-interest (or profit motives), but automatically promotes the society's interest.

But critiques of this theory argue that Adam Smith, so preoccupied by political economy, carelessly disregarded such social psychological aspect of consumption as what sociologically oriented economist Thorstein Veblen (1899/1979) called "conspicuous consumption." For many people, Veblen suggested, consumption is not just about actual use but also about a means to displaying their social standings. For this reason, for the same quality, some of us tend to choose a more expensive product. Compare, for example, two t-shirts made of the same cotton, one of which is, say, adidas (\$14.99), and the other, abibas (\$4.99). Which would you choose?

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz (2002) also argues, very cynically, that "the reason the invisible hand often was invisible was that it wasn't there." Indeed, "many of the aspects of our inequality are a result of market failure."

## **Socialism**



There are several key words to understand what socialism is like, at the center of which placed is "COOPERATION." (Courtesy of Worker Justice Wisconsin)

**Socialism** is an economic system in which there is government ownership (often referred to as "state run") of goods and their production, with an impetus to share work and wealth equally among the members of a society. Under socialism, everything that people produce, including services, is considered a social product. Everyone who contributes to the production of a good or to providing a service is entitled to a share in any benefits that come from its sale or use. To make sure all members of society get their fair share, governments must be able to control property, production, and distribution.

The focus in socialism is on benefitting society, whereas capitalism seeks to benefit the individual. Socialists claim that a capitalistic economy leads to inequality, with unfair distribution of wealth and individuals who use their power at the expense of society. Socialism strives, ideally, to control the economy to avoid the problems inherent in capitalism.

Within socialism, there are diverging views on the extent to which the economy should be controlled. One extreme believes all but the most personal items are public property. Other socialists believe only essential services such as healthcare, education, and utilities (electrical power, telecommunications, and sewage) need direct control. Under this form of socialism, farms, small shops, and businesses can be privately owned but are subject to government regulation. Just as there's no 100% pure capitalist country, there's no 100% pure socialist country, too, so far.

Because of challenges in their economies, several of these communist countries have moved from central planning to letting market forces help determine many production and pricing decisions. **Market socialism** describes a subtype of socialism that adopts certain traits of capitalism, like allowing limited private ownership or consulting market demands. This could involve situations like profits generated by a company going directly to the employees of the company or being used as public funds (Gregory and Stuart 2003). Many Eastern European and some South American countries have mixed economies. Key industries are nationalized and directly controlled by the government; however, most businesses are privately owned and regulated by the government.

## Theoretical Perspectives on the Economy

Now that we've developed an understanding of the history and basic components of economies, let's turn to theory. How might social scientists study these topics? What questions do they ask? What theories do they develop to add to the body of sociological knowledge?

### Functionalist Perspective

Someone taking a functional perspective will most likely view work and the economy as a well-oiled machine that is designed for maximum efficiency. The Davis-Moore thesis, for example, suggests that some social stratification is a social necessity. The need for certain highly skilled positions combined with the relative difficulty of the occupation and the

length of time it takes to qualify will result in a higher reward for that job and will provide a financial motivation to engage in more education and a more difficult profession (Davis and Moore 1945). This theory can be used to explain the prestige and salaries that go with careers only available to those with doctorates or medical degrees.

The functionalist perspective would assume that the continued health of the economy is vital to the health of the nation, as it ensures the distribution of goods and services. For example, we need food to travel from farms (high-functioning and efficient agricultural systems) via roads (safe and effective trucking and rail routes) to urban centers (high-density areas where workers can gather). However, sometimes a dysfunction—a function with the potential to disrupt social institutions or organization (Merton 1968)—in the economy occurs, usually because some institutions fail to adapt quickly enough to changing social conditions. This lesson has been driven home recently with the bursting of the housing bubble. Due to risky lending practices and an underregulated financial market, we are recovering from the after-effects of the Great Recession, which Merton would likely describe as a major dysfunction.

Some of this is cyclical. Markets produce goods as they are supposed to, but eventually the market is saturated and the supply of goods exceeds the demands. Typically the market goes through phases of surplus, or excess, inflation, where the money in your pocket today buys less than it did yesterday, and **recession**, which occurs when there are two or more consecutive quarters of economic decline. The functionalist would say to let market forces fluctuate in a cycle through these stages. In reality, to control the risk of an economic **depression** (a sustained recession across several economic sectors), the U.S. government will often adjust interest rates to encourage more lending—and consequently more spending. In short, letting the natural cycle fluctuate is not a gamble most governments are willing to take.

## Conflict Perspective

For a conflict perspective theorist, the economy is not a source of stability for society. Instead, the economy reflects and reproduces economic inequality, particularly in a capitalist marketplace. The conflict perspective is classically Marxist, with the bourgeoisie (ruling class) accumulating wealth and power by exploiting and perhaps oppressing the proletariat (workers), and regulating those who cannot work (the aged, the infirm) into the great mass of unemployed (Marx and Engels 1848). From the symbolic (though probably made up) statement of Marie Antoinette, who purportedly said, “Let them eat cake” when told that the peasants were starving, to the Occupy Wall Street movement that began during the Great Recession, the sense of inequity is almost unchanged. Conflict theorists believe wealth is concentrated in the hands of those who do not deserve it. As of 2010, 20 percent of Americans owned 90 percent of U.S. wealth (Domhoff 2014). While the inequality might not be as extreme as in pre-revolutionary France, it is enough to make many believe that the United States is not the meritocracy it seems to be.

## Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Those working in the symbolic interaction perspective take a microanalytical view of society. They focus on the way reality is socially constructed through day-to-day interaction and how society is composed of people communicating based on a shared understanding of symbols.

One important symbolic interactionist concept related to work and the economy is **career inheritance**. This concept means simply that children tend to enter the same or similar occupation as their parents, which is a correlation that has been demonstrated in research studies (Antony 1998). For example, the children of police officers learn the norms and values that will help them succeed in law enforcement, and since they have a model career path to follow, they may find law enforcement even more attractive. Related to career inheritance is career socialization—learning the norms and values of a particular job.

Finally, a symbolic interactionist might study what contributes to job satisfaction. Melvin Kohn and his fellow researchers (1990) determined that

workers were most likely to be happy when they believed they controlled some part of their work, when they felt they were part of the decision-making processes associated with their work, when they have freedom from surveillance, and when they felt integral to the outcome of their work. Sunyal, Sunyal, and Yasin (2011) found that a greater sense of vulnerability to stress, the more stress experienced by a worker, and a greater amount of perceived risk consistently predicted a lower worker job satisfaction.

## Summary

Economy refers to the social institution through which a society's resources (goods and services) are managed. The Agricultural Revolution led to development of the first economies that were based on trading goods. Mechanization of the manufacturing process led to the Industrial Revolution and gave rise to two major competing economic systems. Under capitalism, private owners invest their capital and that of others to produce goods and services they can sell in an open market. Prices and wages are set by supply and demand and competition. Under socialism, the means of production is commonly owned, and the economy is controlled centrally by government. Several countries' economies exhibit a mix of both systems. Convergence theory seeks to explain the correlation between a country's level of development and changes in its economic structure.

## Further Research

Green jobs have the potential to improve not only your prospects of getting a good job, but the environment as well. To learn more about the green revolution in jobs go to <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/greenjobs>

One alternative to traditional capitalism is to have the workers own the company for which they work. To learn more about company-owned businesses check out: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/company-owned>

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## Glossary

### bartering

a process where people exchange one form of goods or services for another

## capitalism

an economic system in which there is private ownership (as opposed to state ownership) and where there is an impetus to produce profit, and thereby wealth

## career inheritance

a practice where children tend to enter the same or similar occupation as their parents

## convergence theory

a sociological theory to explain how and why societies move toward similarity over time as their economies develop

## depression

a sustained recession across several economic sectors

## market socialism

a subtype of socialism that adopts certain traits of capitalism, like allowing limited private ownership or consulting market demand

## mercantilism

an economic policy based on national policies of accumulating silver and gold by controlling markets with colonies and other countries through taxes and customs charges

## money

an object that a society agrees to assign a value to so it can be exchanged as payment

## mutualism

a form of socialism under which individuals and cooperative groups exchange products with one another on the basis of mutually satisfactory contracts

## recession

two or more consecutive quarters of economic decline

## socialism

an economic system in which there is government ownership (often referred to as “state run”) of goods and their production, with an impetus to share work and wealth equally among the members of a society

subsistence farming

farming where farmers grow only enough to feed themselves and their families

## Globalization and the Economy

- Define globalization and describe its manifestation in modern society
- Discuss the pros and cons of globalization from an economic standpoint



Instant communications have allowed many international corporations to move parts of their businesses to countries where they can save lots of costs. (Photo courtesy of pixabay.com)

## What Is Globalization?

Economists and politicians who support **globalization** explain it to be the process of integrating governments, cultures, and financial markets through international trade into a single world market. Opponents to it, however, point out the extremely uneven power balance between stronger nations (such as the U.S.) and weaker ones, arguing that it is a sophisticated form of colonialism.

## When did it start?

Some maintain that the Industrial Revolution intertwined with the rise of capitalism was the breeding ground for globalization, while others point at the period of European colonialism that started during the era called the Age of Discovery (Rennen et al. 2003). The discovery of Americas by Columbus in 1492 was one of the major events that started colonialism.

Still another observe that it started when a Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping opened up China to the world during the late 1970s, and this "reform" boosted the country's gross domestic product (GDP) at an average annual rate of 9.6% starting in 1978 to reach \$6 trillion in 2010 (e.g., Nathan et al. 2016). The "rise of China" as a global factory became possible because the mode of economy among core nations was coincidentally shifting from industrial to postindustrial. It is thus suggested that globalization is the division of labor on the global level, producing and distributing food (agricultural), goods (industrial), and services (postindustrial).

### **Who controls it?**

Things going on under globalization are closely monitored and highhandedly controlled by such gigantic international organizations as IMF, World Bank, and WTO, all of which are run by the major developed nations, especially the U.S. The IMF, indeed, requires every country to get approval for its prospective economic policies. Nobel Price-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz (2002), hence, points to the similar strategies for international dominance between the IMF methods and the gunboat diplomacy by Commodore Perry against Japan, the Opium War against China, and the like.

Globalization entails international trade, which basically entails tariffs (or taxes). In the post-World War II era, however, the U.S. has been promoting the idea of free trade, establishing GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) immediately followed by WTO (World Trade Organization). Such efforts eventually led to the North American Free Trade Agreement (**NAFTA**) in 1994. The agreement, signed by the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, removes tariffs (taxes) and import laws that restrict international trade.

Many prominent economists and President Bill Clinton promised that NAFTA would lead to major gains in jobs for Americans. By 2010,

nonetheless, the evidence showed an opposite impact; 682,900 U.S. jobs lost across all states (Parks 2011) although NAFTA, on the other hand, helped giant corporations make much more profits than before.

There is a force powerfully pushing globalization, namely, **multinational corporations** that can control assets, production, and sales more efficiently through globalization (United Nations 1973). That is, globalization is tremendously profitable to multinational corporations; a large share of their capital is collected from a variety of nations, and their business is conducted without regard to national borders or regulations. Owing to globalization, hence, wealth can be concentrated in the hands of core nations and already wealthy individuals.

There is a rule in free trade agreements in general, known as "investor-to-state dispute settlement" (**ISDS**) (see AFL-CIO 2013). Foreign investors (i.e., giant corporations) can use this rule to challenge anything that negatively affects their business, such as food safety regulations, minimum wage increase, and so on. This rule seriously constrains governments' ability to protect people, or to say, can ruin their sovereignty.

For example, the Metalclad Corp., a U.S. waste disposal company, sued Mexico, after its project to open and operate a hazardous waste disposal facility was dismissed by the Mexican government; citizens had petitioned the government to block such project that would pollute the community's water supply. The ISDS panel found that Mexico had violated Metalclad's right to "fair and equitable treatment" under NAFTA. Metalclad won \$15.6 million in this case. Under free trade agreements, corporate profits are considered more important than people's health.

We see the emergence of **global assembly lines**, where products are assembled over the course of several international transactions. For instance, Apple designs its next-generation Mac prototype in the United States, components are made in various peripheral nations, they are then shipped to another peripheral nation such as Malaysia for assembly, and tech support is outsourced to India.

Globalization has also led to the development of **global commodity chains**, where internationally integrated economic links connect workers and

corporations for the purpose of manufacture and marketing (Plahe 2005). For example, in *maquiladoras*, mostly found in northern Mexico, workers may sew imported precut pieces of fabric into garments.

Globalization also brings an international division of labor, in which comparatively wealthy workers from core nations compete with the low-wage labor pool of peripheral and semi-peripheral nations. This can lead to a sense of **xenophobia**, which is an illogical fear and even hatred of foreigners and foreign goods. Corporations trying to maximize their profits in the United States are conscious of this risk and attempt to “Americanize” their products, selling shirts printed with U.S. flags that were nevertheless made in Mexico.

## Summary

Globalization refers to the process of integrating governments, cultures, and financial markets through international trade into a single world market. There are benefits and drawbacks to globalization. Often the countries that fare the worst are those that depend on natural resource extraction for their wealth. Many critics fear globalization gives too much power to multinational corporations and that political decisions are influenced by these major financial players.

## Further Research

The World Social Forum (WSF) was created in response to the creation of the World Economic Forum (WEF). The WSF is a coalition of organizations dedicated to the idea of a worldwide civil society and presents itself as an alternative to WEF, which it says is too focused on capitalism. To learn more about the WSF, check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/WSF>

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## Glossary

### global assembly lines

a practice where products are assembled over the course of several international transactions

### global commodity chains

internationally integrated economic links that connect workers and corporations for the purpose of manufacture and marketing

xenophobia

an illogical fear and even hatred of foreigners and foreign goods

## Work in the United States

- Describe the current U.S. workforce and the trend of polarization
- Explain how women and immigrants have changed the modern U.S. workforce
- Understand the basic elements of poverty in the United States today



Many people attend job fairs looking for their first job or for a better one.

(Photo courtesy of Daniel Ramirez/flickr)

There is a great deal of mythology about hard work that is believed to help us climb to success. They say that if you study hard, develop good work habits, and graduate college, then you'll see what the American Dream really means. The reality, though, has always been more complex than suggested by the myth. When the society as a whole got into a deep recession, indeed, personal efforts alone wouldn't make a difference. In 2008, not just the U.S. but the entire world got into the Great Recession resulting from the disastrous failure of financial corporations' greedy strategy called the "subprime loan" (discussed above in this chapter). During this recession, more than 8 million U.S. workers lost their jobs, and unemployment rates surpassed 10% on a national level.

The Great Recession ended in several years. In 2017, the world economy kept growing, more rapidly than before. The New York Times (2018a) even wrote in January, that "Every one of the world's big economies is now growing," and "a synchronous wave of growth... is creating jobs"(2018). Stock prices, housing values, and GDP all keep going up and, on the other hand, unemployment rates, going down.

But then, again, by the end of 2018, stock prices suddenly began falling, globally. The New York Times (2018b), which just had frolicked in January of the same year, now gloomily wrote in December: "The stock market has wiped out its 2018 gains." Although economists analyze the situation this way or that way, let's not trust them; they were always wrong. One thing we can be sure is, though, that the world economy is now chaotic.

Proletariat (or ordinary workers) are always like the feather in the wind. That is, although many of them have got jobs owing to the swing back of the pendulum, when the chilly wind blows again, they might have to loose those jobs they've just got. In this section discussed are several factors that structurally affect such feather's (our) fate.

## **Several Factors That Structurally Affect the Feather's Fate**

The mix of jobs available in the United States began changing many years before the recession struck, and, as mentioned above, the American Dream has not always been easy to achieve.

In the last several decades, the increased **outsourcing**—contracting a job or set of jobs to an outside source—of manufacturing jobs to developing nations has greatly diminished the number of high-paying, often unionized, blue-collar positions available. This trend started, as aforementioned, when China began inviting factories of big corporations, and this successful strategy is being followed by many other developing nations (Center for American Progress 2012).

The intent of big corporations for outsourcing is to take advantage of lower wages and operating costs. Manufacturing employment collapsed in the

U.S., for example, from a high of 19.5 million workers in 1979 to 11.5 million workers in 2009, a decrease by a near half.

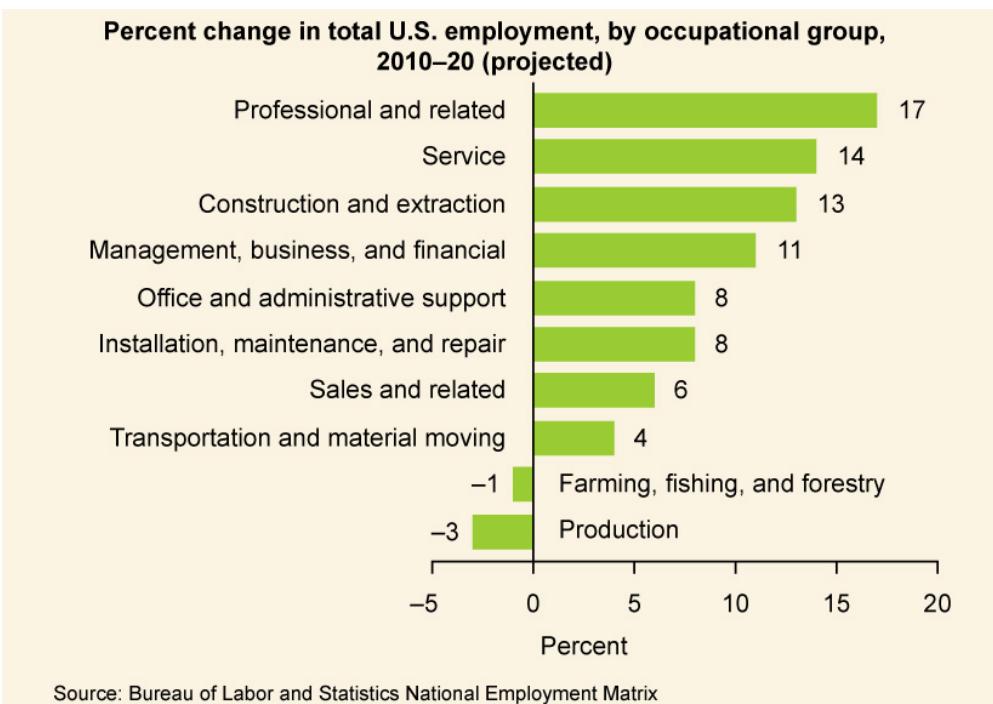
A similar problem has arisen in the white-collar sector, with many low-level clerical and support positions also being outsourced. The number of supervisory and managerial positions has been reduced. Even highly educated skilled workers such as computer programmers have seen their jobs vanish overseas.

The **automation** of the workplace, which replaces workers with technology, is another cause of the changes in the job market; corporations replace people with machines. People are protected by labor laws to some extent, but machines are not, at all.

Computers can be programmed to do many routine tasks faster and less expensively than people who used to do such tasks. Jobs like bookkeeping, clerical work, and repetitive tasks on production assembly lines all lend themselves to automation. Envision your local supermarket's self-scan checkout aisles. The automated cashiers affixed to the units take the place of paid employees. Now one cashier can oversee transactions at six or more self-scan aisles, which was a job that used to require one cashier per aisle.

Despite the ongoing economic recovery, the job market is actually growing in some areas, but in a very polarized fashion. At one end, there has been strong demand for low-skilled, low-paying jobs in industries like food service and retail. On the other end, research indicates that in certain fields there has been a steadily increasing demand for highly skilled and educated professionals, technologists, and managers. These high-skilled positions also tend to be highly paid (Autor 2010).

With so many jobs being outsourced or eliminated by automation, what kind of jobs are there a demand for in the United States? While fishing and forestry jobs are in decline, in several markets jobs are increasing. These include community and social service, personal care and service, finance, computer and information services, and healthcare. The chart below, from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, illustrates areas of projected growth.



This chart shows the projected growth of several occupational groups. (Graph courtesy of the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook)

The professional and related jobs, which include any number of positions, typically require significant education and training and tend to be lucrative career choices. Service jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, can include everything from jobs with the fire department to jobs scooping ice cream (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). There is a wide variety of training needed, and therefore an equally large wage potential discrepancy. One of the largest areas of growth by industry, rather than by occupational group (as seen above), is in the health field. This growth is across occupations, from associate-level nurse's aides to management-level assisted-living staff. As baby boomers age, they are living longer than any generation before, and the growth of this population segment requires an increase in capacity throughout our country's elder care system, from home healthcare nursing to geriatric nutrition.

Notably, jobs in farming are in decline. This is an area where those with less education traditionally could be assured of finding steady, if low-wage, work. With these jobs disappearing, more and more workers will find themselves untrained for the types of employment that are available.

Another projected trend in employment relates to the level of education and training required to gain and keep a job. As the chart below shows us, growth rates are higher for those with more education. Those with a professional degree or a master's degree may expect job growth of 20 and 22 percent respectively, and jobs that require a bachelor's degree are projected to grow 17 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, jobs that require a high school diploma or equivalent are projected to grow at only 12 percent, while jobs that require less than a high school diploma will grow 14 percent. Quite simply, without a degree, it will be more difficult to find a job. It is worth noting that these projections are based on overall growth across all occupation categories, so obviously there will be variations within different occupational areas. However, once again, those who are the least educated will be the ones least able to fulfill the American Dream.

In the past, rising education levels in the United States had been able to keep pace with the rise in the number of education-dependent jobs. However, since the late 1970s, men have been enrolling in college at a lower rate than women, and graduating at a rate of almost 10 percent less. The lack of male candidates reaching the education levels needed for skilled positions has opened opportunities for women, minorities, and immigrants (Wang 2011).

## **Women in the Workforce**

Women have been entering the workforce in ever-increasing numbers for several decades. They have also been finishing college and going on to earn higher degrees at higher rate than men do. This has resulted in many women being better positioned to obtain high-paying, high-skill jobs (Autor 2010).

While women are getting more and better jobs and their wages are rising more quickly than men's wages are, U.S. Census statistics show that they

are still earning only 77% of what men are for the same positions (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

## Immigration and the Workforce

People migrate from places where there are few or no jobs to those where there are jobs. The joblessness is one of the major **push factors** for migration; it pushes people out of their homeland. Due to its reputation as the land of opportunity, the United States has long been the destination of all skill levels of workers.

Job opportunities are one of the major **pull factors**; they pull potential migrants. While the rate decreased somewhat during the economic slowdown of 2008, immigrants, both legal and illegal, continue to be a major part of the U.S. workforce.

In 2005, prior to the recession, immigrants made up a historic high of 14.7% of the workforce (Lowell et al. 2006). During the 1970s through 2000s, the United States experienced both an increase in college-educated immigrants and in immigrants who lacked a high school diploma. With this range across the spectrum, immigrants are well positioned for both the higher-paid jobs and the low-wage, low-skill jobs, which are predicted to grow in the next decade (*ibid.*).

In the early 2000s, it certainly seemed that the United States was continuing to live up to its reputation of opportunity. But what about during the recession of 2008, when so many jobs were lost and unemployment hovered close to 10%? How did immigrant workers fare then?

The answer is this. As of June 2009, when the recession officially ended, “foreign-born workers gained 656,000 jobs while native-born workers lost 1.2 million jobs” (Kochhar 2010). As these numbers suggest, the unemployment rate that year decreased for immigrant workers and increased for native workers. Some Pew research suggests immigrants tend to have greater flexibility to move from job to job and that the immigrant population may have been early victims of the recession, and thus were quicker to rebound (*ibid.*). Although the number of jobs increases,

immigrant earnings are in decline, and some theorize that increase in employment may come from a willingness to accept significantly low wages and bad working conditions.

Chronically unemployed people, including immigrants, are called in Marx's terminology, **reserve army of labor**, which is necessary to capitalists to exploit all laborers (Giddens 1971, p. 56). When economy becomes bad, they are the first to be easily laid off. When more workers are needed, they will be called back. And, as just mentioned above, they accept low wages and bad working conditions.

# of jobs to be filled (buyer = bourgeois)	# of workers available (seller = proletariat)	working conditions, wages
50	80	low
100	80	high
100	80 + reserve army of labor (40)	low

### The Mechanism of "Labor Market"

In any markets, when the number of sellers is bigger than that of buyers, the price has to be lowered, and conversely, when the number of sellers is smaller than that of buyers, the price can go up. In the labor market, the same thing is happening; when the number of workers is bigger than that of the number of jobs, working conditions and wages have to be lowered, and conversely, when the number of workers is smaller than that of jobs, working conditions and wages can go up (see above). In order to avoid the latter case (good working conditions and wages), the government (the powerful friend of giant corporations) adds and maintains a large number of

chronically unemployed people, or immigrants (legal or illegal), called "reserve army of labor."

## Unemployment in the United States

The **unemployment rate** announced by the government doesn't show us a clear picture related to unemployment in the country. It is calculated by this formula:

$$\text{Unemployment rate} = \text{unemployed} / \text{entire labor force}$$

When the size of "unemployed" (numerator) is big, the rate is high. Conversely, when it is small, the rate is low. For example, assume that the size of "entire labor force (denominator) is 100, and that of "unemployed" is 10. This results in 10%. But from 10, if the government excludes 5, it will result in 5%. Do they do it? Why?

The government officers actually exclude many from the "unemployed" for several reasons. First, they exclude "underemployment," that is, not fully employed but anyway employed (part timers) or skilled but doing unskilled jobs and paid way less than qualified. Second, they also exclude those who earned wages, however small, during a given period of time. Third, those who are not actively looking for a job in the past four weeks, for whatever the reason, are also excluded. As a result, many suggest, the unemployment rate announced by the government always looks rosier than what's actually going on.



There is great debate about how much support local, state, and federal governments should give to help the unemployed and underemployed. The decisions made on these issues will have a profound effect on working in the United States.

Is prolonged unemployment an effect of something, or a cause for something? Anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1965) argued that prolonged unemployment is an effect of **culture of poverty**, a set of traits observed among the poor who share remarkably similar family structure, time orientation, value systems, and spending patterns. By sharp contrast, Sociologist William Julius Wilson believes that prolonged unemployment causes many of today's problems in the inner-city ghetto neighborhoods, such as crime, family dissolution, female-headed families, and so on (1996-1997, p. 567; paraphrased). In another words, for Wilson, what Lewis called "culture of poverty" is the effect (or the result) of prolonged unemployment.

## Summary

The job market in the United States is meant to be a meritocracy that creates social stratifications based on individual achievement. Economic forces, such as outsourcing and automation, are polarizing the workforce, with most job opportunities being either low-level, low-paying manual jobs

or high-level, high-paying jobs based on abstract skills. Women's role in the workforce has increased, although women have not yet achieved full equality. Immigrants play an important role in the U.S. labor market. The changing economy has forced more people into poverty even if they are working. Welfare, Social Security, and other social programs exist to protect people from the worst effects of poverty.

## Further Research

The role of women in the workplace is constantly changing. To learn more, check out [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women\\_workplace](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/women_workplace)

The Employment Projections Program of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics looks at a ten-year projection for jobs and employment. To see some trends for the next decade, check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/BLS>

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## Glossary

automation  
workers being replaced by technology

outsourcing  
a practice where jobs are contracted to an outside source, often in another country

**polarization**

a practice where the differences between low-end and high-end jobs become greater and the number of people in the middle levels decreases

**structural unemployment**

a societal level of disjunction between people seeking jobs and the jobs that are available

**underemployment**

a state in which a person accepts a lower paying, lower status job than his or her education and experience qualifies him or her to perform

## Collective Behavior

- Describe different forms of collective behavior
- Differentiate between types of crowds
- Discuss emergent norm, value-added, and assembling perspective analyses of collective behavior

### Note:

#### Flash Mobs



Is this a good time had by all? Some flash mobs may function as political protests, while others are for fun. This flash mob pillow fight's purpose was to entertain. (Photo courtesy of Mattwi1S0n:/flickr)

In March 2014, a group of musicians got together in a fish market in Odessa for a spontaneous performance of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" from his Ninth Symphony. While tensions were building over Ukraine's efforts to join the European Union, and even as Russian troops had taken control of the Ukrainian airbase in Belbek, the Odessa Philharmonic Orchestra and

Opera Chorus tried to lighten the troubled times for shoppers with music and song.

Spontaneous gatherings like this are called **flash mobs**. They often are captured on video and shared on the Internet; frequently they go viral. Humans seek connections and shared experiences. Perhaps experiencing a flash mob event enhances this bond. It certainly interrupts our otherwise mundane routine with a reminder that we are social animals.

## Forms of Collective Behavior

Flash mobs are examples of **collective behavior**, noninstitutionalized activity in which several or many people voluntarily engage. Other examples are a group of commuters traveling home from work and a population of teens adopting a favorite singer's hairstyle. In short, collective behavior is any group behavior that is not mandated or regulated by an institution. There are three primary forms of collective behavior: the crowd, the mass, and the public.

When a large number of people share a physical space, such as the subway train, but do not share any interests or ideas together, they are called a **crowd** (Lofland 1993). When people share a common interest but do not share a physical space, such as players of the popular Facebook game Farmville, they are a **mass** (Lofland 1993). A **public** is an unorganized, relatively diffused group of people who share ideas, such as the Libertarian political party.

## Theoretical Perspectives on Collective Behavior

Early collective behavior theories (LeBon 1895; Blumer 1969) focused on the irrationality of crowds. Eventually, those theorists who viewed crowds as uncontrolled groups of irrational people were supplanted by theorists who viewed the behavior some crowds engaged in as the rational behavior of logical beings.

## Emergent-Norm Perspective



According to the emergent-norm perspective, Hurricane Katrina victims sought needed supplies for survival, but to outsiders their behavior would normally be seen as looting. (Photo courtesy of Infrogmation/Wikimedia Commons)

Sociologists Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian (1993) built on earlier sociological ideas and developed what is known as emergent norm theory. They believe that the norms experienced by people in a crowd may be disparate and fluctuating. They emphasize the importance of these norms in shaping crowd behavior, especially those norms that shift quickly in response to changing external factors. **Emergent norm theory** asserts that, in this circumstance, people perceive and respond to the crowd situation with their particular (individual) set of norms, which may change as the

crowd experience evolves. This focus on the individual component of interaction reflects a symbolic interactionist perspective.

For Turner and Killian, the process begins when individuals suddenly find themselves in a new situation, or when an existing situation suddenly becomes strange or unfamiliar. For example, think about human behavior during Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans was decimated and people were trapped without supplies or a way to evacuate. In these extraordinary circumstances, what outsiders saw as “looting” was defined by those involved as seeking needed supplies for survival. Normally, individuals would not wade into a corner gas station and take canned goods without paying, but given that they were suddenly in a greatly changed situation, they established a norm that they felt was reasonable.

Once individuals find themselves in a situation ungoverned by previously established norms, they interact in small groups to develop new guidelines on how to behave. According to the emergent-norm perspective, crowds are not viewed as irrational, impulsive, uncontrolled groups. Instead, norms develop and are accepted as they fit the situation. While this theory offers insight into why norms develop, it leaves undefined the nature of norms, how they come to be accepted by the crowd, and how they spread through the crowd.

## Value-Added Theory

Neil Smelser's (1962) meticulous categorization of crowd behavior, called **value-added theory**, is a perspective within the functionalist tradition based on the idea that several conditions must be in place for collective behavior to occur. Each condition adds to the likelihood that collective behavior will occur. The first condition is *structural conduciveness*, which occurs when people are aware of the problem and have the opportunity to gather, ideally in an open area. *Structural strain*, the second condition, refers to people's expectations about the situation at hand being unmet, causing tension and strain. The next condition is the *growth and spread of a generalized belief*, wherein a problem is clearly identified and attributed to a person or group.

Fourth, *precipitating factors* spur collective behavior; this is the emergence of a dramatic event. The fifth condition is *mobilization for action*, when leaders emerge to direct a crowd to action. The final condition relates to action by the agents. Called *social control*, it is the only way to end the collective behavior episode (Smelser 1962).

A real-life example of these conditions occurred after the fatal police shooting of teenager Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old African American, in Ferguson, MO on August 9, 2014. The shooting drew national attention almost immediately. A large group of mostly black, local residents assembled in protest—a classic example of structural conduciveness. When the community perceived that the police were not acting in the people's interest and were withholding the name of the officer, structural strain became evident. A growing generalized belief evolved as the crowd of protesters were met with heavily armed police in military-style protective uniforms accompanied by an armored vehicle. The precipitating factor of the arrival of the police spurred greater collective behavior as the residents mobilized by assembling a parade down the street. Ultimately they were met with tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets used by the police acting as agents of social control. The element of social control escalated over the following days until August 18, when the governor called in the National Guard.



Agents of social control bring collective behavior to an end. (Photo courtesy of hozinja/flickr)

## Assembling Perspective

Interactionist sociologist Clark McPhail (1991) developed **assembling perspective**, another system for understanding collective behavior that credited individuals in crowds as rational beings. Unlike previous theories, this theory refocuses attention from collective behavior to collective action. Remember that collective behavior is a noninstitutionalized gathering, whereas collective action is based on a shared interest. McPhail's theory focused primarily on the processes associated with crowd behavior, plus the lifecycle of gatherings. He identified several instances of convergent or collective behavior, as shown on the chart below.

Type of crowd	Description	Example
Convergence clusters	Family and friends who travel together	Carpooling parents take several children to the movies
Convergent orientation	Group all facing the same direction	A semi-circle around a stage

Type of crowd	Description	Example
Collective vocalization	Sounds or noises made collectively	Screams on a roller coaster
Collective verbalization	Collective and simultaneous participation in a speech or song	Pledge of Allegiance in the school classroom
Collective gesticulation	Body parts forming symbols	The YMCA dance
Collective manipulation	Objects collectively moved around	Holding signs at a protest rally
Collective locomotion	The direction and rate of movement to the event	Children running to an ice cream truck

Clark McPhail identified various circumstances of convergent and collective behavior (McPhail 1991).

As useful as this is for understanding the components of how crowds come together, many sociologists criticize its lack of attention on the large cultural context of the described behaviors, instead focusing on individual actions.

## Summary

Collective behavior is noninstitutionalized activity in which several people voluntarily engage. There are three different forms of collective behavior: crowd, mass, and public. There are three main theories on collective behavior. The first, the emergent-norm perspective, emphasizes the importance of social norms in crowd behavior. The next, the value-added theory, is a functionalist perspective that states that several preconditions

must be in place for collective behavior to occur. Finally the assembling perspective focuses on collective action rather than collective behavior, addressing the processes associated with crowd behavior and the lifecycle and various categories of gatherings.

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## Glossary

### acting crowds

crowds of people who are focused on a specific action or goal

### assembling perspective

a theory that credits individuals in crowds as behaving as rational thinkers and views crowds as engaging in purposeful behavior and collective action

### casual crowds

- people who share close proximity without really interacting
  - collective behavior
    - a noninstitutionalized activity in which several people voluntarily engage
  - conventional crowds
    - people who come together for a regularly scheduled event
  - crowd
    - a fairly large number of people who share close proximity
  - emergent norm theory
    - a perspective that emphasizes the importance of social norms in crowd behavior
  - expressive crowds
    - crowds who share opportunities to express emotions
  - flash mob
    - a large group of people who gather together in a spontaneous activity that lasts a limited amount of time
  - mass
    - a relatively large group with a common interest, even if they may not be in close proximity
  - public
    - an unorganized, relatively diffuse group of people who share ideas
  - value-added theory
    - a functionalist perspective theory that posits that several preconditions must be in place for collective behavior to occur

## Social Movements

- Demonstrate awareness of social movements on a state, national, and global level
- Distinguish between different types of social movements
- Identify stages of social movements
- Discuss theoretical perspectives on social movements, like resource mobilization, framing, and new social movement theory

**Social movements** can be defined as organized actions taken through groupings of individuals and/or organizations that may empower ordinary people to change existing social/political structures (see, e.g., Deric 2011). While most of us learned about social movements in history classes, we tend to take for granted the fundamental changes they caused as if they were naturally "given" rather than socially or politically "gotten."

Called **reification**, this is the tendency that people view the social reality going on at the macro level to be "beyond their control" (Ritzer 2010, p. 59), as if they were hurricanes or earthquakes. Notice, however, that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not "given," but "gotten" through a series of social movements known as the civil rights movement. Social movements can bear fruit if, and *only if*, a large number of people support them.

## Levels of Social Movements

Movements happen in our towns, in our nation, and around the world. Let's take a look at examples of social movements, from local to global. No doubt you can think of others on all of these levels, especially since modern technology has allowed us a near-constant stream of information about the quest for social change around the world.

### Local

Chicago is a city of highs and lows, from corrupt politicians and failing schools to innovative education programs and a thriving arts scene. Not surprisingly, it has been home to a number of social movements over time.

Currently, AREA Chicago is a social movement focused on “building a socially just city” (AREA Chicago 2011). The organization seeks to “create relationships and sustain community through art, research, education, and activism” (AREA Chicago 2011). The movement offers online tools like the Radicalendar—a calendar for getting radical and connected—and events such as an alternative to the traditional Independence Day picnic. Through its offerings, AREA Chicago gives local residents a chance to engage in a movement to help build a socially just city.

## **State**



Texas Secede! is an organization which would like Texas to secede from the United States. (Photo courtesy of Tim Pearce/flickr)

At the other end of the political spectrum from AREA Chicago is the Texas Secede! social movement in Texas. This statewide organization promotes the idea that Texas can and should secede from the United States to become an independent republic. The organization, which as of 2014 has over 6,000 “likes” on Facebook, references both Texas and national history in

promoting secession. The movement encourages Texans to return to their rugged and individualistic roots, and to stand up to what proponents believe is the theft of their rights and property by the U.S. government (Texas Secede! 2009).

## **National**

A polarizing national issue that has helped spawn many activist groups is gay marriage. While the legal battle is being played out state by state, the issue is a national one.

The Human Rights Campaign, a nationwide organization that advocates for LGBT civil rights, has been active for over thirty years and claims more than a million members. One focus of the organization is its Americans for Marriage Equality campaign. Using public celebrities such as athletes, musicians, and political figures, it seeks to engage the public in the issue of equal rights under the law. The campaign raises awareness of the over 1,100 different rights, benefits, and protections provided on the basis of marital status under federal law and seeks to educate the public about why these protections should be available to all committed couples regardless of gender (Human Rights Campaign 2014).

A movement on the opposite end is the National Organization for Marriage, an organization that funds campaigns to stop same-sex marriage (National Organization for Marriage 2014). Both these organizations work on the national stage and seek to engage people through grassroots efforts to push their message. In February 2011, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder released a statement saying President Barack Obama had concluded that “due to a number of factors, including a documented history of discrimination, classification based on sexual orientation should be subject to a more heightened standard of scrutiny.” The statement said, “Section 3 of DOMA [the Defense of Marriage Act of 1993], as applied to legally married same-sex couples, fails to meet that standard and is therefore unconstitutional.” With that the Department was instructed not to defend the statute in such cases (Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs 2011; AP/Huffington Post 2011).

## Global

Social organizations worldwide take stands on such general areas of concern as poverty, sex trafficking, and the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food. **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)** (NGOs) are formed to support or lead such movements. They are nonprofit and supported by donations. Greenpeace, an internationally coordinating organization whose main focus is placed on environmental issues, is an example.

## Types of Social Movements

We know that social movements can occur on the local, national, or even global stage. Are there other patterns or classifications that can help us understand them? Sociologist David Aberle (1966) addresses this question by developing categories that distinguish among social movements based on what they want to change and how much change they want.

**Reform movements** seek to change or modify something specific about the social structure. Examples include antinuclear groups, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the Dreamers movement for immigration reform, and the Human Rights Campaign's advocacy for Marriage Equality.

**Revolutionary movements** seek to completely overturn the existing social/political structure. There were two major revolutions that were ignited by the Industrial Revolution. One is the American Revolution, through which the U.S. got the independence from Britain and the other, the French Revolution, for which feudalism in entire Europe began collapsing.

Although the civil rights movement in the 1960s brought great changes in the U.S., as it didn't overturn the existing government, strictly saying, it's not considered to be a revolution. If the south (or Confederate) won the American Civil War and took over the U.S. government, that would have been a revolution--although it would have been a hell-like nightmare.

**Proactive social movements** promote social changes. If the American Civil War were considered a movement, it would have been a proactive social

movement, as it aimed at the abolition of slavery. **Reactive social movements** try to push back the situation, which has been changed, to the previous condition. The enactment of a series of the Jim Crow laws by White Southerners immediately after the Civil War is an example (see Ch. 7, Race and Ethnicity). It was to segregate ex-slaves emancipated after the war. The laws continued to be enforced until the latter half of the twentieth century.

Another examples of "proactive social movements" related to the Jim Crow laws include: the lawsuits called *Brown v Board of Education* of 1954, which cleanly knocked down the laws' insistence, "separate but equal"; the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the product of the civil rights movement, that banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin in employment practices and public accommodations. Recently, though, a series of reactions to the proactive movements are taken by the so-called white supremacists, reactions which can be understood as an example of "reactive social movements."

## Stages of Social Movements

Later sociologists studied the lifecycle of social movements—how they emerge, grow, and in some cases, die out. Blumer (1969) and Tilly (1978) outline a four-stage process. In the *preliminary stage*, people become aware of an issue, and leaders emerge. This is followed by the *coalescence stage* when people join together and organize in order to publicize the issue and raise awareness. In the *institutionalization stage*, the movement no longer requires grassroots volunteerism: it is an established organization, typically with a paid staff. When people fall away and adopt a new movement, the movement successfully brings about the change it sought, or when people no longer take the issue seriously, the movement falls into the *decline stage*. Each social movement discussed earlier belongs in one of these four stages. Where would you put them on the list?

### Note:

Social Media and Social Change: A Match Made in Heaven



In 2008, Obama's campaign used social media to tweet, like, and friend its way to victory.

(Photo courtesy of bradleyolin/flickr)

Chances are you have been asked to tweet, friend, like, or donate online for a cause. Maybe you were one of the many people who, in 2010, helped raise over \$3 million in relief efforts for Haiti through cell phone text donations. Or maybe you follow presidential candidates on Twitter and retweet their messages to your followers. Perhaps you have “liked” a local nonprofit on Facebook, prompted by one of your neighbors or friends liking it too. Nowadays, social movements are woven throughout our social media activities. After all, social movements start by activating people.

Referring to the ideal type stages discussed above, you can see that social media has the potential to dramatically transform how people get involved. Look at stage one, the *preliminary stage*: people become aware of an issue, and leaders emerge. Imagine how social media speeds up this step.

Suddenly, a shrewd user of Twitter can alert his thousands of followers about an emerging cause or an issue on his mind. Issue awareness can spread at the speed of a click, with thousands of people across the globe becoming informed at the same time. In a similar vein, those who are savvy and engaged with social media emerge as leaders. Suddenly, you don't need to be a powerful public speaker. You don't even need to leave

your house. You can build an audience through social media without ever meeting the people you are inspiring.

At the next stage, the *coalescence stage*, social media also is transformative. Coalescence is the point when people join together to publicize the issue and get organized. President Obama's 2008 campaign was a case study in organizing through social media. Using Twitter and other online tools, the campaign engaged volunteers who had typically not bothered with politics and empowered those who were more active to generate still more activity. It is no coincidence that Obama's earlier work experience included grassroots community organizing. What is the difference between his campaign and the work he did in Chicago neighborhoods decades earlier? The ability to organize without regard to geographical boundaries by using social media. In 2009, when student protests erupted in Tehran, social media was considered so important to the organizing effort that the U.S. State Department actually asked Twitter to suspend scheduled maintenance so that a vital tool would not be disabled during the demonstrations.

So what is the real impact of this technology on the world? Did Twitter bring down Mubarak in Egypt? Author Malcolm Gladwell (2010) doesn't think so. In an article in *New Yorker* magazine, Gladwell tackles what he considers the myth that social media gets people more engaged. He points out that most of the tweets relating to the Iran protests were in English and sent from Western accounts (instead of people on the ground). Rather than increasing engagement, he contends that social media only increases participation; after all, the cost of participation is so much lower than the cost of engagement. Instead of risking being arrested, shot with rubber bullets, or sprayed with fire hoses, social media activists can click "like" or retweet a message from the comfort and safety of their desk (Gladwell 2010).

There are, though, good cases to be made for the power of social media in propelling social movements. In the article, "Parrhesia and Democracy: Truth-telling, WikiLeaks and the Arab Spring," Theresa Sauter and Gavin Kendall (2011) describe the importance of social media in the Arab Spring uprisings. Parrhesia means "the practice of truth-telling," which describes the protestors' use of social media to make up for the lack of coverage and even misrepresentation of events by state-controlled media. The Tunisian blogger Lina Ben Mhenni posted photographs and videos on Facebook and

Twitter of events exposing the violence committed by the government. In Egypt the journalist Asmaa Mahfouz used Facebook to gather large numbers of people in Tahrir Square in the capital city of Cairo. Sauter and Kendall maintain that it was the use of Web 2.0 technologies that allowed activists not only to share events with the world but also to organize the actions.

When the Egyptian government shut down the Internet to stop the use of social media, the group Anonymous, a hacking organization noted for online acts of civil disobedience initiated "Operation Egypt" and sent thousands of faxes to keep the public informed of their government's activities (CBS Interactive Inc. 2014) as well as attacking the government's web site (Wagensiel 2011). In its Facebook press release the group stated the following: "Anonymous wants you to offer free access to uncensored media in your entire country. When you ignore this message, not only will we attack your government websites, Anonymous will also make sure that the international media sees the horrid reality you impose upon your people."

Sociologists have identified high-risk activism, such as the civil rights movement, as a "strong-tie" phenomenon, meaning that people are far more likely to stay engaged and not run home to safety if they have close friends who are also engaged. The people who dropped out of the movement—who went home after the danger got too great—did not display any less ideological commitment. But they lacked the strong-tie connection to other people who were staying. Social media, by its very makeup, is "weak-tie" (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). People follow or friend people they have never met. But while these online acquaintances are a source of information and inspiration, the lack of engaged personal contact limits the level of risk we'll take on their behalf.



Donation Update: Over \$21 Million in  
\$10 donations raised for the people of  
**#Haiti** through the **@RedCross** text  
HAITI to 90999 campaign.



After a devastating earthquake  
in 2010, Twitter and the Red  
Cross raised millions for Haiti  
relief efforts through phone  
donations alone. (Photo  
courtesy of  
Cambodia4KidsOrg/flickr)

## Theoretical Perspectives on Social Movements

Most theories of social movements are called collective action theories, indicating the purposeful nature of this form of collective behavior. The following three theories are but a few of the many classic and modern theories developed by social scientists.

### Resource Mobilization

McCarthy and Zald (1977) conceptualize **resource mobilization theory** as a way to explain movement success in terms of the ability to acquire resources and mobilize individuals. Resources are primarily time and money, and the more of both, the greater the power of organized movements. Numbers of social movement organizations (SMOs), which are single social movement groups, with the same goals constitute a social

movement industry (SMI). Together they create what McCarthy and Zald (1977) refer to as "the sum of all social movements in a society."

### **Resource Mobilization and the Civil Rights Movement**

The civil rights movement had existed well before **Rosa Parks** refused to give up her bus seat to a white man. What happened was this. In Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, Rosa Parks was sitting in the "colored section" of the bus, but as the whites-only section was filled, the bus driver asked her to give up her seat for a white passenger, which she refused (!). This violated the Jim Crow laws, which required colored people in such situation to give up their seat for whites, and thus, Rosa was arrested and fined \$10 (!). What would you do if you were her?

Rosa Parks' disobedience to the Jim Crow laws triggered the Montgomery bus boycott, which eventually led to the civil rights movement. She was later called "the first lady of civil rights" (Schmitz 2014). Less known than this is that she was a member of the NAACP (see below) and trained in leadership (A&E Television Networks, LLC. 2014). But her action that day was spontaneous and unplanned (*ibid.*).

During these events, **Martin Luther King Jr.** who led the enormous momentum toward the civil rights movement became the charismatic leader. It is important to note that a large number of whites supported the movement. Initially, major newspapers reported the movement as racial riots and war against the white population, but television news programs began showing violence and discrimination practiced by whites (e.g., police) against blacks (William 2004). Having watched what it was actually like, 75,000 whites joined 250,000 protesters marching in Washington in 1963 (Issel 1985, p. 181). They followed white folk singer Joan Baez singing "We shall overcome," and heard Martin Luther King Jr. describe his dream of racial equality and announce that "we will not be satisfied until justice rolls."

Many social movement organizations grew and joined the existing ones. Although the movement in that period was an overall success, and laws

were proactively changed, the "movement" still continues in order to fight reactive movements. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court has recently weakened the Voter Rights Act of 1965, once again making it more difficult for African Americans and other minorities to vote.

Founded in 1909, one of the most important social movement organizations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), has been fighting racism. Its mission today is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic *equality* of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based *discrimination* (NAACP 2018). The same old? Yes, the relationship between the proactive and reactive movements is like the pendulum swinging back and forth... As the reactive movements persist, the proactive movements keep combating with them.

## Framing/Frame Analysis

Over the past several decades, sociologists have developed the concept of frames to explain how individuals identify and understand social events and which norms they should follow in any given situation (Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000). Imagine entering a restaurant. Your "frame" immediately provides you with a behavior template. It probably does not occur to you to wear pajamas to a fine-dining establishment, throw food at other patrons, or spit your drink onto the table. However, eating food at a sleepover pizza party provides you with an entirely different behavior template. It might be perfectly acceptable to eat in your pajamas and maybe even throw popcorn at others or Guzzle drinks from cans.

Successful social movements use three kinds of frames (Snow and Benford 1988) to further their goals. The first type, **diagnostic framing**, states the problem in a clear, easily understood way. When applying diagnostic frames, there are no shades of gray: instead, there is the belief that what "they" do is wrong and this is how "we" will fix it. The anti-gay marriage movement is an example of diagnostic framing with its uncompromising insistence that marriage is only between a man and a woman. **Prognostic framing**, the second type, offers a solution and states how it will be

implemented. Some examples of this frame, when looking at the issue of marriage equality as framed by the anti-gay marriage movement, include the plan to restrict marriage to “one man/one woman” or to allow only “civil unions” instead of marriages. As you can see, there may be many competing prognostic frames even within social movements adhering to similar diagnostic frames. Finally, **motivational framing** is the call to action: what should you do once you agree with the diagnostic frame and believe in the prognostic frame? These frames are action-oriented. In the gay marriage movement, a call to action might encourage you to vote “no” on Proposition 8 in California (a move to limit marriage to male-female couples), or conversely, to contact your local congressperson to express your viewpoint that marriage should be restricted to male-female couples.

With so many similar diagnostic frames, some groups find it best to join together to maximize their impact. When social movements link their goals to the goals of other social movements and merge into a single group, a **frame alignment process** (Snow et al. 1986) occurs—an ongoing and intentional means of recruiting participants to the movement.

This frame alignment process has four aspects: bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation. *Bridging* describes a “bridge” that connects uninvolved individuals and unorganized or ineffective groups with social movements that, though structurally unconnected, nonetheless share similar interests or goals. These organizations join together to create a new, stronger social movement organization. Can you think of examples of different organizations with a similar goal that have banded together?

In the *amplification* model, organizations seek to expand their core ideas to gain a wider, more universal appeal. By expanding their ideas to include a broader range, they can mobilize more people for their cause. For example, the Slow Food movement extends its arguments in support of local food to encompass reduced energy consumption, pollution, obesity from eating more healthfully, and more.

In *extension*, social movements agree to mutually promote each other, even when the two social movement organization’s goals don’t necessarily relate to each other’s immediate goals. This often occurs when organizations are

sympathetic to each others' causes, even if they are not directly aligned, such as women's equal rights and the civil rights movement.

Extension occurs when social movements have sympathetic causes. Women's rights, racial equality, and LGBT advocacy are all human rights issues. (Photos (a) and (b) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (c) courtesy of Charlie Nguyen/flickr)



*Transformation* means a complete revision of goals. Once a movement has succeeded, it risks losing relevance. If it wants to remain active, the

movement has to change with the transformation or risk becoming obsolete. For instance, when the women's suffrage movement gained women the right to vote, members turned their attention to advocating equal rights and campaigning to elect women to office. In short, transformation is an evolution in the existing diagnostic or prognostic frames that generally achieves a total conversion of the movement.

## New Social Movement Theory

**New social movement theory**, a development of European social scientists in the 1950s and 1960s, attempts to explain the proliferation of postindustrial and postmodern movements that are difficult to analyze using traditional social movement theories. Rather than being one specific theory, it is more of a perspective that revolves around understanding movements as they relate to politics, identity, culture, and social change. Some of these more complex interrelated movements include ecofeminism, which focuses on the patriarchal society as the source of environmental problems, and the transgender rights movement. Sociologist Steven Buechler (2000) suggests that we should be looking at the bigger picture in which these movements arise—shifting to a macro-level, global analysis of social movements.

### The Movement to Legalize Marijuana

The early history of marijuana in the United States includes its use as an over-the-counter medicine as well as various industrial applications. Its recreational use eventually became a focus of regulatory concern. Public opinion, swayed by a powerful propaganda campaign by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics in the 1930s, remained firmly opposed to the use of marijuana for decades. In the 1936 church-financed propaganda film "Reefer Madness," marijuana was portrayed as a dangerous drug that caused insanity and violent behavior.

One reason for the recent shift in public attitudes about marijuana, and the social movement pushing for its decriminalization, is a more-informed understanding of its effects that largely contradict its earlier

characterization. The public has also become aware that penalties for possession have been significantly disproportionate along racial lines. U.S. Census and FBI data reveal that blacks in the United States are between two to eight times more likely than whites to be arrested for possession of marijuana (Urbina 2013; Matthews 2013). Further, the resulting incarceration costs and prison overcrowding are causing states to look closely at decriminalization and legalization.

In 2012, marijuana was legalized for recreational purposes in Washington and Colorado through ballot initiatives approved by voters. While it remains a Schedule One controlled substance under federal law, the federal government has indicated that it will not intervene in state decisions to ease marijuana laws.

## Summary

Social movements are purposeful, organized groups, either with the goal of pushing toward change, giving political voice to those without it, or gathering for some other common purpose. Social movements intersect with environmental changes, technological innovations, and other external factors to create social change. There are a myriad of catalysts that create social movements, and the reasons that people join are as varied as the participants themselves. Sociologists look at both the macro- and microanalytical reasons that social movements occur, take root, and ultimately succeed or fail.

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## Glossary

### alternative movements

social movements that limit themselves to self-improvement changes in individuals

### diagnostic framing

a the social problem that is stated in a clear, easily understood manner

### frame alignment process

using bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation as an ongoing and intentional means of recruiting participants to a

movement

motivational framing  
a call to action

new social movement theory

a theory that attempts to explain the proliferation of postindustrial and postmodern movements that are difficult to understand using traditional social movement theories

NGO

nongovernmental organizations working globally for numerous humanitarian and environmental causes

prognostic framing

social movements that state a clear solution and a means of implementation

reform movements

movements that seek to change something specific about the social structure

religious/redemptive movements

movements that work to promote inner change or spiritual growth in individuals

resistance movements

those who seek to prevent or undo change to the social structure

resource mobilization theory

a theory that explains social movements' success in terms of their ability to acquire resources and mobilize individuals

revolutionary movements

movements that seek to completely change every aspect of society

social movement industry

the collection of the social movement organizations that are striving toward similar goals

social movement organization  
a single social movement group

social movement sector  
the multiple social movement industries in a society, even if they have widely varying constituents and goals

social movement  
a purposeful organized group hoping to work toward a common social goal

## Social Change

- Explain how technology, social institutions, population, and the environment can bring about social change
- Discuss the importance of modernization in relation to social change

Collective behavior and social movements are just two of the forces driving **social change**, which is the change in society created through social movements as well as external factors like environmental shifts or technological innovations. Essentially, any disruptive shift in the status quo, be it intentional or random, human-caused or natural, can lead to social change. Below are some of the likely causes.

## Causes of Social Change

Changes to technology, social institutions, population, and the environment, alone or in some combination, create change. Below, we will discuss how these act as agents of social change, and we'll examine real-world examples. We will focus on four agents of change that social scientists recognize: technology, social institutions, population, and the environment.

## The Darker Side of Technology: Electronic Aggression in the Information Age

The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) uses the term "electronic aggression" to describe "any type of harassment or bullying that occurs through e-mail, a chat room, instant messaging, a website (including blogs), or text messaging" (CDC, n.d.) We generally think of this as cyberbullying. A 2011 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that 27.8 percent of students aged twelve through eighteen reported experiencing bullying. From the same sample 9 percent specifically reported having been a victim of cyberbullying (Robers et al. 2013).

Cyberbullying represents a powerful change in modern society. William F. Ogburn (1922) might have been describing it nearly a century ago when he defined "cultural lag," which occurs when material culture precedes

nonmaterial culture. That is, society may not fully comprehend all the consequences of a new technology and so may initially reject it (such as stem cell research) or embrace it, sometimes with unintended negative consequences (such as pollution).

Cyberbullying is a special feature of the Internet. Unique to electronic aggression is that it can happen twenty-four hours a day, every day; it can reach a child (or an adult) even though she or he might otherwise feel safe in a locked house. The messages and images may be posted anonymously and to a very wide audience, and they might even be impossible to trace. Finally, once posted, the texts and images are very hard to delete. Its effects range from the use of alcohol and drugs to lower self-esteem, health problems, and even suicide (CDC, n.d.).

**Note:**

**The Story of Megan Meier**

According to the Megan Meier Foundation web site (2014a), Megan Meier had a lifelong struggle with weight, attention deficit disorder, and depression. But then a sixteen-year-old boy named Josh Evans asked Megan, who was thirteen years old, to be friends on the social networking web site MySpace. The two began communicating online regularly, though they never met in person or spoke on the phone. Now Megan finally knew a boy who, she believed, really thought she was pretty.

But things changed, according to the Megan Meier Foundation web site (2014b). Josh began saying he didn't want to be friends anymore, and the messages became cruel on October 16, 2006, when Josh concluded by telling Megan, "The world would be a better place without you." The cyberbullying escalated when additional classmates and friends on MySpace began writing disturbing messages and bulletins. That night Megan hanged herself in her bedroom closet, three weeks before what would have been her fourteenth birthday.

According to an ABC News article titled, "Parents: Cyber Bullying Led to Teen's Death" (2007), it was only later that a neighbor informed Megan's parents that Josh was not a real person. Instead, "Josh's" account was created by the mother of a girl who used to be friends with Megan.

You can find out more of Megan's story at her mother's web site:  
<http://www.meganmeierfoundation.org/>

## Social Institutions

Each change in a single social institution leads to changes in all social institutions. For example, the industrialization of society meant that there was no longer a need for large families to produce enough manual labor to run a farm. Further, new job opportunities were in close proximity to urban centers where living space was at a premium. The result is that the average family size shrunk significantly.

This same shift toward industrial corporate entities also changed the way we view government involvement in the private sector, created the global economy, provided new political platforms, and even spurred new religions and new forms of religious worship like Scientology. It has also informed the way we educate our children: originally schools were set up to accommodate an agricultural calendar so children could be home to work the fields in the summer, and even today, teaching models are largely based on preparing students for industrial jobs, despite that being an outdated need. A shift in one area, such as industrialization, means an interconnected impact across social institutions.

## The Environment

Turning to human ecology, we know that individuals and the environment affect each other. As human populations move into more vulnerable areas, we see an increase in the number of people affected by natural disasters, and we see that human interaction with the environment increases the impact of those disasters. Part of this is simply the numbers: the more people there are on the planet, the more likely it is that some will be affected by a natural disaster.

But it goes beyond that. Movements like 350.org describe how we have already seen five extinctions of massive amounts of life on the planet, and the crisis of global change has put us on the verge of yet another. According to their website, "The number 350 means climate safety: to preserve a livable planet, scientists tell us we must reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere from its current level of 400 parts per million to below 350 ppm" (350.org).

The environment is best described as an ecosystem, one that exists as the interplay of multiple parts including 8.7 million species of life. However dozens of species are going extinct every day, a number 1,000 times to 10,000 times the normal "background rate" and the highest rate since the dinosaurs disappeared 65 million years ago. The Center for Biological Diversity states that this extinction crisis, unlike previous ones caused by natural disasters, is "caused almost entirely by us" (Center for Biological Diversity, n.d.). The growth of the human population, currently over seven billion and expected to rise to nine or ten billion by 2050, perfectly correlates with the rising extinction rate of life on earth.

**Note:**

**Hurricane Katrina: When It All Comes Together**

The four key elements that affect social change that are described in this chapter are the environment, technology, social institutions, and population. In 2005, New Orleans was struck by a devastating hurricane. But it was not just the hurricane that was disastrous. It was the converging of all four of these elements, and the text below will connect the elements by putting the words in parentheses.

Before Hurricane Katrina (environment) hit, poorly coordinated evacuation efforts had left about 25 percent of the population, almost entirely African Americans who lacked private transportation, to suffer the consequences of the coming storm (demographics). Then "after the storm, when the levees broke, thousands more [refugees] came. And the city buses, meant to take them to proper shelters, were underwater" (Sullivan 2005). No public transportation was provided, drinking water and communications were delayed, and FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

(institutions), was headed by an appointee with no real experience in emergency management. Those who were eventually evacuated did not know where they were being sent or how to contact family members. African Americans were sent the farthest from their homes. When the displaced began to return, public housing had not been reestablished, yet the Superdome stadium, which had served as a temporary disaster shelter, had been rebuilt. Homeowners received financial support, but renters did not.

As it turns out, it was not entirely the hurricane that cost the lives of 1,500 people, but the fact that the city's storm levees (technology), which had been built too low and which failed to meet numerous other safety specifications, gave way, flooding the lower portions of the city, occupied almost entirely by African Americans.

Journalist Naomi Klein, in her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, presents a theory of a "triple shock," consisting of an initial disaster, an economic shock that replaces public services with private (for-profit) ones, and a third shock consisting of the intense policing of the remaining public. Klein supports her claim by quoting then-Congressman Richard Baker as saying, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did." She quotes developer Joseph Canizaro as stating, "I think we have a clean sheet to start again. And with that clean sheet we have some very big opportunities." One clean sheet was that New Orleans began to replace public schools with charters, breaking the teachers' union and firing all public school teachers (Mullins 2014). Public housing was seriously reduced and the poor were forced out altogether or into the suburbs far from medical and other facilities (The Advocate 2013). Finally, by relocating African Americans and changing the ratio of African Americans to whites, New Orleans changed its entire demographic makeup.

## Modernization--and Postmodernism

**Modernization** describes the processes that increase the amount of specialization and differentiation of structure in societies resulting in the move from an undeveloped society to a developed, technologically driven

society (Irwin 1975). By this definition, the level of modernity within a society is judged by the sophistication of its technology, particularly as it relates to infrastructure, industry, and the like. However, it is important to note the inherent ethnocentric (or Eurocentric) bias of such assessment.

Why do we assume that those living in semi-peripheral or peripheral nations would find it so wonderful to become more like the core nations in terms of how they are related to one another? Is the way business people living in big cities are related to others, such as friends and families, necessarily better than that farmers in small folk villages are related to others? Is modernization always positive?

Yes, in terms of technologies, modernization is definitely positive. Really? There are many counterarguments against this, though. For example, Sigmund Freud (1989 [1961]), in his *Civilization and Its Discontent*, keenly albeit cynically argued that:

If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice; if traveling across the ocean by ship had not been introduced, my friend would not have embarked on his sea-voyage and I should not need a cable to relieve my anxiety about him. (Freud 1989 [1961], p. 40)

In the early twentieth century, some scholars began arguing against modernization--similarly to, but more seriously than, Freud. Behind this loom were the end of colonialism, the uprising of women, the revolt of other cultures against white Western hegemony (Flax 1990, p. 5). Their ideas are called **postmodernism**, “a philosophy that has reached strongly against several assumptions of modernity, namely, those concerning progress, history, causality, system, absolutes, meaning, the unitary self, technological judgment, and conformity” (Glass 1993, p. 1).

A feminist in support for postmodernism argues that the “inherent connections Enlightenment [or modernist] thinkers posited between science, progress, and happiness appear disturbingly ironic when we contemplate Hiroshima, Auschwitz, or the possibility of a ‘nuclear winter’” (Flax 1990, p. 8). According to postmodernists, modernization centers

around male thinking, or to say, rich white men's ideologies. It ended, they argue, and it was a failure; it didn't make humans happy.

Recall that sociology "was born" because of the great social changes, i.e., modernization triggered by the Industrial Revolution. This means that sociology is essentially about modernization. To be noted, though, sociology is not a science that supports modernization, but is the one that studies issues resulting from the social changes. Therefore, it's very important to understand counterarguments against modernization, such as postmodernism.

## Summary

There are numerous and varied causes of social change. Four common causes, as recognized by social scientists, are technology, social institutions, population, and the environment. All four of these areas can impact when and how society changes. And they are all interrelated: a change in one area can lead to changes throughout. Modernization is a typical result of social change. Modernization refers to the process of increased differentiation and specialization within a society, particularly around its industry and infrastructure. While this assumes that more modern societies are better, there has been significant pushback on this western-centric view that all peripheral and semi-peripheral countries should aspire to be like North America and Western Europe.

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## Glossary

### crowdsourcing

the process of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people

### modernization

the process that increases the amount of specialization and differentiation of structure in societies

### social change

the change in a society created through social movements as well as through external factors like environmental shifts or technological innovations

## Introduction to Health and Medicine

class="introduction"

Medical personnel  
are at the front lines  
of extremely  
dangerous work.  
Personal protective  
clothing is essential  
for any health  
worker entering an  
infection zone, as  
shown by these  
trainees for the  
UK's National  
Health Service.

(Photo courtesy of  
DFID - UK  
Department for  
International  
Development/flickr  
)



According to the World Health Organization and ABC Health News, on March 19, 2014 a "mystery" hemorrhagic fever outbreak occurred in Liberia and Sierra Leone. This outbreak was later confirmed to be Ebola, a disease first discovered in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. The 2014 outbreak started a chain reaction in West Africa, sickening more than 8,000 people and leaving more than 4,000 dead by October.

At the time of this writing, Ebola is national news in the United States, and certainly global news as well. Infection of U.S. medical staff (both in West Africa and at home) has led to much fear and distrust, and discussion of restrictions on flights from West Africa was one proposed way to stop the spread of the disease. Ebola first entered the United States via U.S. missionary medical staff who were infected in West Africa and then transported home for treatment. The case of Thomas Eric Duncan, who unwittingly imported Ebola into the United States as he flew from Liberia to Texas in September 2014 to visit family, increased the level of fear.

How do we best respond to this horrific virus? Restrict visitors from West Africa, enhance training and protective gear for all U.S. medical workers and law enforcement? Many concerns surround this disease and few agree

upon the appropriate response. You can follow the progression of the outbreak at <http://abc7news.com/news/timeline-of-the-ebola-virus-in-america-/348789/>.

The Ebola case brings many issues to the forefront. Are we in the cross-hairs of a large-scale Ebola epidemic in the United States? Or are the few cases of infection (primarily of health professionals) as far as the disease will spread in the United States? In the short term, how do we best prevent, identify, and treat current and potential cases?

The sociology of health encompasses social epidemiology, disease, mental health, disability, and medicalization. The way that we perceive health and illness is in constant evolution. As we learn to control existing diseases, new diseases develop. As our society evolves to be more global, the way that diseases spread evolves with it.

What does “health” mean to you? Do you believe that there are too many people taking medications in U.S. society? Are you skeptical about people claiming they are “addicted” to gambling or “addicted” to sex? Can you think of anything that was historically considered a disease but is now considered within a range of normality? Or anything that has recently become known as a disease that before was considered evidence of laziness or other character flaws? Do you believe all children should receive vaccinations? These are questions examined in the sociology of health.

Sociologists may also understand these issues more fully by considering them through one of the main theoretical perspectives of the discipline. The functionalist perspective is a macroanalytical perspective that looks at the big picture and focuses on the way that all aspects of society are integral to the continued health and viability of the whole. For those working within the functionalist perspective, the focus is on how healthy individuals have the most to contribute to the stability of society. Functionalists might study the most efficient way to restore “sick” individuals to a healthy state. The conflict perspective is another macroanalytical perspective that focuses on the creation and reproduction of inequality. Someone applying the conflict perspective might focus on inequalities within the health system itself, by looking at disparities in race, ethnicity, gender, and age. Someone applying the interactionist perspective to health might focus on how people

understand their health, and how their health affects their relationships with the people in their lives.

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## The Social Construction of Health

- Define the term medical sociology
- Understand the difference between the cultural meaning of illness, the social construction of illness, and the social construction of medical knowledge

If sociology is the systematic study of human behavior in society, **medical sociology** is the systematic study of how humans manage issues of health and illness, disease and disorders, and healthcare for both the sick and the healthy. Medical sociologists study the physical, mental, and social components of health and illness. Major topics for medical sociologists include the doctor/patient relationship, the structure and socioeconomic of healthcare, and how culture impacts attitudes toward disease and wellness.

The social construction of health is a major research topic within medical sociology. At first glance, the concept of a social construction of health does not seem to make sense. After all, if disease is a measurable, physiological problem, then there can be no question of socially constructing disease, right? Well, it's not that simple. The idea of the social construction of health emphasizes the socio-cultural aspects of the discipline's approach to physical, objectively definable phenomena. Sociologists Conrad and Barker (2010) offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the major findings of the last fifty years of development in this concept. Their summary categorizes the findings in the field under three subheadings: the cultural meaning of illness, the social construction of the illness experience, and the social construction of medical knowledge.

## The Cultural Meaning of Illness

Many medical sociologists contend that illnesses have both a biological and an experiential component, and that these components exist independently of each other. Our culture, not our biology, dictates which illnesses are stigmatized and which are not, which are considered disabilities and which are not, and which are deemed contestable (meaning some medical professionals may find the existence of this ailment questionable) as

opposed to definitive (illnesses that are unquestionably recognized in the medical profession) (Conrad and Barker 2010).

For instance, sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) described how social stigmas hinder individuals from fully integrating into society. In essence, Goffman suggests we might view illness as a stigma that can push others to view the ill in an undesirable manner. The **stigmatization of illness** often has the greatest effect on the patient and the kind of care he/she receives. Many contend that our society and even our healthcare institutions discriminate against certain diseases—like mental disorders, AIDS, venereal (genital) diseases, and skin disorders (Sartorius 2007). Facilities for these diseases may be sub-par; they may be segregated from other healthcare areas or relegated to a poorer environment. The stigma may keep people from seeking help for their illness, making it worse than it needs to be.

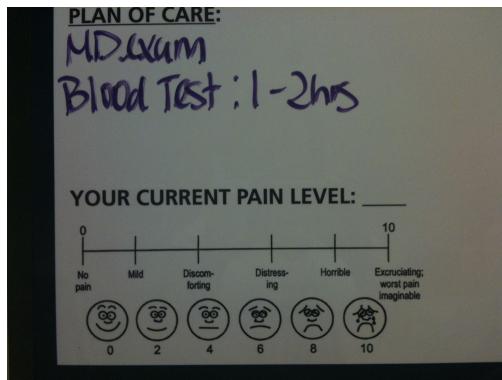
## **The Social Construction of the Illness Experience**

The idea of the social construction of the illness experience is based on the concept of reality as a social construction. In other words, there is no objective reality; there are only our own perceptions of it. The social construction of the illness experience deals with such issues as the way some patients control the manner in which they reveal their diseases and the lifestyle adaptations patients develop to cope with their illnesses.

In terms of constructing the illness experience, culture and individual personality both play a significant role. For some people, a long-term illness can have the effect of making their world smaller, more defined by the illness than anything else. For others, illness can be a chance for discovery, for re-imaging a new self (Conrad and Barker 2007). Culture plays a huge role in how an individual experiences illness. Widespread diseases like AIDS or breast cancer have specific cultural markers that have changed over the years and that govern how individuals—and society—view them.

Today, many institutions of wellness acknowledge the degree to which individual perceptions shape the nature of health and illness. Regarding physical activity, for instance, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

recommends that individuals use a standard level of exertion to assess their physical activity. This Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) gives a more complete view of an individual's actual exertion level, since heartrate or pulse measurements may be affected by medication or other issues (Centers for Disease Control 2011a). Similarly, many medical professionals use a comparable scale for perceived pain to help determine pain management strategies.



The Mosby pain rating scale helps health care providers assess an individual's level of pain. What might a symbolic interactionist observe about this method?  
(Photo courtesy of [wrestlingentropy/flickr](#))

## The Social Construction of Medical Knowledge

Conrad and Barker show how medical knowledge is socially constructed; that is, it can both reflect and reproduce inequalities in gender, class, race, and ethnicity. Conrad and Barker (2011) use the example of the social construction of women's health and how medical knowledge has changed

significantly in the course of a few generations. For instance, in the early nineteenth century, pregnant women were discouraged from driving or dancing for fear of harming the unborn child, much as they are discouraged, with more valid reason, from smoking or drinking alcohol today.

**Note:**

Has Breast Cancer Awareness Gone Too Far?



Pink ribbons are a ubiquitous reminder of breast cancer. But do pink ribbon chocolates do anything to eradicate the disease? (Photo courtesy of [wishuponacupcake](#)/Wikimedia Commons)

Every October, the world turns pink. Football and baseball players wear pink accessories. Skyscrapers and large public buildings are lit with pink lights at night. Shoppers can choose from a huge array of pink products. In 2014, people wanting to support the fight against breast cancer could purchase any of the following pink products: KitchenAid mixers, Master Lock padlocks and bike chains, Wilson tennis rackets, Fiat cars, and Smith & Wesson handguns. You read that correctly. The goal of all these pink products is to raise awareness and money for breast cancer. However, the relentless creep of pink has many people wondering if the pink marketing juggernaut has gone too far.

Pink has been associated with breast cancer since 1991, when the Susan G. Komen Foundation handed out pink ribbons at its 1991 Race for the Cure event. Since then, the pink ribbon has appeared on countless products, and then by extension, the color pink has come to represent support for a cure of the disease. No one can argue about the Susan G. Komen Foundation's mission—to find a cure for breast cancer—or the fact that the group has raised millions of dollars for research and care. However, some people question if, or how much, all these products really help in the fight against breast cancer (Begos 2011).

The advocacy group Breast Cancer Action (BCA) position themselves as watchdogs of other agencies fighting breast cancer. They accept no funding from entities, like those in the pharmaceutical industry, with potential profit connections to this health industry. They've developed a trademarked "Think Before You Pink" campaign to provoke consumer questioning of the end contributions made to breast cancer by companies hawking pink wares. They do not advise against "pink" purchases; they just want consumers to be informed about how much money is involved, where it comes from, and where it will go. For instance, what percentage of each purchase goes to breast cancer causes? BCA does not judge how much is enough, but it informs customers and then encourages them to consider whether they feel the amount is enough (Think Before You Pink 2012).

BCA also suggests that consumers make sure that the product they are buying does not actually *contribute* to breast cancer, a phenomenon they call "pinkwashing." This issue made national headlines in 2010, when the Susan G. Komen Foundation partnered with Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) on a promotion called "Buckets for the Cure." For every bucket of grilled or regular fried chicken, KFC would donate fifty cents to the Komen Foundation, with the goal of reaching 8 million dollars: the largest single donation received by the foundation. However, some critics saw the partnership as an unholy alliance. Higher body fat and eating fatty foods has been linked to increased cancer risks, and detractors, including BCA, called the Komen Foundation out on this apparent contradiction of goals. Komen's response was that the program did a great deal to raise awareness in low-income communities, where Komen previously had little outreach (Hutchison 2010).

What do you think? Are fundraising and awareness important enough to trump issues of health? What other examples of “pinkwashing” can you think of?

## Summary

Medical sociology is the systematic study of how humans manage issues of health and illness, disease and disorders, and healthcare for both the sick and the healthy. The social construction of health explains how society shapes and is shaped by medical ideas.

## Further Research

Spend some time on the two web sites below. How do they present differing views of the vaccination controversy? Freedom of Choice is Not Free: Vaccination News: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/vaccination\\_news](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/vaccination_news) and Shot by Shot: Stories of Vaccine-Preventable Illnesses: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/shot\\_by\\_shot](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/shot_by_shot)

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## Glossary

### contested illnesses

illnesses that are questioned or considered questionable by some medical professionals

### medical sociology

the systematic study of how humans manage issues of health and illness, disease and disorders, and healthcare for both the sick and the healthy

stigmatization of illness

illnesses that are discriminated against and whose sufferers are looked down upon or even shunned by society

## Global Health

- Define social epidemiology
- Apply theories of social epidemiology to an understanding of global health issues
- Understand the differences between high-income and low-income nations

**Social epidemiology** focuses on how different social conditions are related to different types of diseases. The health problems of core nations, indeed, differ greatly from those of peripheral nations. For example, some diseases, like cancer, are universal. But others, like obesity, heart disease, respiratory disease, and diabetes are much more common in core (high-income) nations than in peripheral (low-income) nations. Core nations also have a higher incidence of depression (Bromet et al. 2011). In contrast, peripheral nations suffer significantly from malaria and tuberculosis.

How does health differ around the world? Some theorists differentiate among three types of countries: core nations, semi-peripheral nations, and peripheral nations. Core nations are those that we think of as highly developed or industrialized, semi-peripheral nations are those that are often called developing or newly industrialized, and peripheral nations are those that are relatively undeveloped. While the most pervasive issue in the U.S. healthcare system is affordable access to healthcare, other core countries have different issues, and semi-peripheral and peripheral nations are faced with a host of additional concerns. Reviewing the status of global health offers insight into the various ways that politics and wealth shape access to healthcare, and it shows which populations are most affected by health disparities.

## Health in Core Nations

Obesity, which is on the rise in high-income nations, has been linked to many diseases, including cardiovascular problems, musculoskeletal problems, diabetes, and respiratory issues. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2011), obesity rates are rising in all countries, with the greatest gains being made in the highest-income

countries. The United States has the highest obesity rate. Wallace Huffman and his fellow researchers (2006) contend that several factors are contributing to the rise in obesity in developed countries:

1. Improvements in technology and reduced family size have led to a reduction of work to be done in household production.
2. Unhealthy market goods, including processed foods, sweetened drinks, and sweet and salty snacks are replacing home-produced goods.
3. Leisure activities are growing more sedentary, for example, computer games, web surfing, and television viewing.
4. More workers are shifting from active work (agriculture and manufacturing) to service industries.
5. Increased access to passive transportation has led to more driving and less walking.

Obesity and weight issues have significant societal costs, including lower life expectancies and higher shared healthcare costs.

High-income countries also have higher rates of depression than less affluent nations. A recent study (Bromet et al. 2011) shows that the average lifetime prevalence of major depressive episodes in the ten highest-income countries in the study was 14.6 percent; this compared to 11.1 percent in the eight low- and middle-income countries. The researchers speculate that the higher rate of depression may be linked to the greater income inequality that exists in the highest-income nations.

## **Health in Peripheral Nations**



In low-income countries, malnutrition and lack of access to clean water contribute to a high child mortality rate. (Photo courtesy of Steve Evans/flickr)

In peripheral nations with low per capita income, it is not the cost of healthcare that is the most pressing concern. Rather, low-income countries must manage such problems as infectious disease, high infant mortality rates, scarce medical personnel, and inadequate water and sewer systems. Such issues, which high-income countries rarely even think about, are central to the lives of most people in low-income nations. Due to such health concerns, low-income nations have higher rates of infant mortality and lower average life spans.

One of the biggest contributors to medical issues in low-income countries is the lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation resources. According to a 2014 UNICEF report, almost half of the developing world's population lacks improved sanitation facilities. The World Health Organization (WHO) tracks health-related data for 193 countries. In their 2011 World Health Statistics report, they document the following statistics:

1. Globally, the rate of mortality for children under five was 60 per 1,000 live births. In low-income countries, however, that rate is almost double at 117 per 1,000 live births. In high-income countries, that rate is significantly lower than seven per 1,000 live births.
2. The most frequent causes of death for children under five were pneumonia and diarrheal diseases, accounting for 18 percent and 15 percent, respectively. These deaths could be easily avoidable with cleaner water and more coverage of available medical care.
3. The availability of doctors and nurses in low-income countries is one-tenth that of nations with a high income. Challenges in access to medical education and access to patients exacerbate this issue for

would-be medical professionals in low-income countries (World Health Organization 2011).

## Further Research

Study this map on global life expectancies:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/global\\_life\\_expectancies](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/global_life_expectancies). What trends do you notice?

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## Glossary

**social epidemiology**

the study of the causes and distribution of diseases

## Health in the United States

- Understand how social epidemiology can be applied to health in the United States
- Explain disparities of health based on gender, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity
- Give an overview of mental health and disability issues in the United States
- Explain the terms stigma and medicalization

Health in the United States is a complex issue. Although this country is the champion of the world in terms of the GDP, it evidently lags behind all industrialized countries in terms of providing care to all its citizens and of the quality of its healthcare. The following sections look at several aspects of health in the United States.

### Health by Race and Ethnicity

When looking at the social epidemiology of the United States, it is hard to miss the disparities among races. The discrepancy between black and white Americans shows the gap clearly; in 2008, the average **life expectancy** for white males was approximately five years longer than for black males: 75.9 compared to 70.9. An even stronger disparity was found in 2007: the **infant mortality** rate (the number of deaths of babies younger than one year old per 1,000) for blacks was nearly twice that of whites (13.2 to 5.6) (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). According to a report from the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation (2007), African Americans also have higher incidence of several other diseases and causes of mortality, from cancer to heart disease to diabetes. In a similar vein, it is important to note that ethnic minorities, including Mexican Americans and Native Americans, also have higher rates of these diseases and causes of mortality than whites.

Lisa Berkman (2009) notes that this gap started to narrow during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, but it began widening again in the early 1980s. What accounts for these perpetual disparities in health among different ethnic groups? Much of the answer lies in the level of healthcare that these groups receive. The National Healthcare Disparities Report

(2010) shows that even after adjusting for insurance differences, racial and ethnic minority groups receive poorer quality of care and less access to care than dominant groups. As discussed in Ch. 7 (Race and Ethnicity), this results, in part, from **residential segregation** by social class as well as by race. The Report identified these racial inequalities in care:

1. Black Americans, American Indians, and Alaskan Natives received inferior care than Caucasian Americans for about 40% of measures.
2. Asian ethnicities received inferior care for about 20% of measures.
3. Among whites, Hispanic whites received 60% inferior care of measures compared to non-Hispanic whites (Agency for Health Research and Quality 2010). When considering access to care, the figures were comparable.

Another cause for the disparities among races in terms of health in the U.S. is the healthcare costs, ridiculously expensive compared to any other industrialized countries. A new study from academic researchers found, indeed, that 66.5% of all bankruptcies in the U.S. were tied to medical issues (CNBC 2019). An estimated 530,000 families turn to bankruptcy each year because of medical issues and bills, the research found.

The expensive healthcare costs in the U.S. can cause not just bankruptcy but even death. According to the Gallup (2019), indeed, more than 13% of American adults--or about 34 million people--report knowing of at least one friend or family member in the past five years who died after not receiving needed medical treatment because they were unable to pay for it. Nonwhites, those in lower-income households, and those younger than 45 are all more likely to know someone who has died under these circumstances. In all, it is estimated that about 2.8 million persons died this way in 2017.

## Health by Socioeconomic Status

Discussions of health by race and ethnicity often overlap with those of health by social class, since the two variables are closely intertwined in the United States. As the Agency for Health Research and Quality (2010) notes, “racial and ethnic minorities are more likely than whites to be poor or near

poor," so race and social class tend to overlap to some extent. It is reported that one of the strongest predictors of morbidity (the incidence of disease) and mortality (death) is social class (Winkleby 1992).

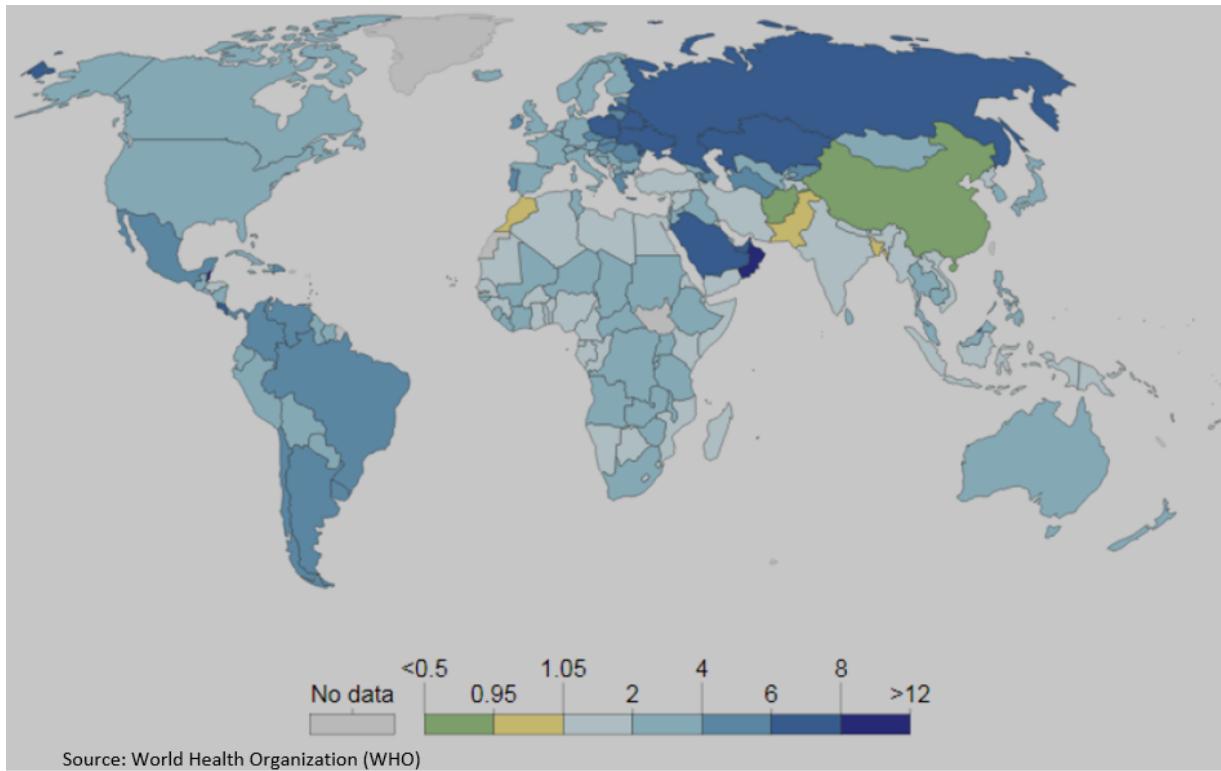
Among the 3 determinants of social class, education plays an important role for health. Phelan and Link (2003) note that initially, social class didn't make a difference in terms of chances to get such behavior-influenced diseases as lung cancer (from smoking), heart disease (from poor eating and exercise habits), and AIDS. However, once information linking habits to disease was disseminated, these diseases decreased among middle-class people but not among lower-class people.

## **Health by Gender**

Women have been neglected in the healthcare industry. As they are more educated than before, many complain such situation. In 2008, one quarter of females questioned the quality of her healthcare (Ranji and Salganico 2011). Further examination of the lack of confidence in the healthcare system by women, as identified in the Kaiser study, found, for example, low-class women were more likely (32% compared to 23%) to express concerns about healthcare quality.

Women are three times more likely than men to be diagnosed with certain kinds of mental disorders, such as instability of identity, of mood, and of behavior. Psychologist Dana Becker decries the pejorative connotation of the diagnosis, saying that it predisposes many people, both within and outside of the profession of psychotherapy, against women who have been so diagnosed. This is a good example of "stigmatization of illness," although, of course, it's a bad phenomenon.

## **Gender Ratio by Suicide Rates, 2004 (WHO)**



On the other hand, research indicates that in almost all countries, except a very few, such as China and Afghanistan, men are more likely than women to commit suicide (e.g., Travis 1990). The figure above (Gender Ratio by Suicide Rates, 2004) shows, for example, that in the United States (the color light blue), while one woman commits suicide, between 2 and 4 men commit suicide. In East Europe (the dark blue), such as Russia, the number of men who commit suicide, while one woman commits suicide, jumps up to between 8 and 12.

How did Durkheim explain suicide? Yes, it's "solidarity" that he used as the factor that can cause the phenomenon. Does it mean that there's a difference between men and women in terms of solidarity, almost worldwide? That is, are men more isolated than women? Are women more cooperative than men? In other words, are men more likely than women to face competitive situations than cooperative ones?

## Mental Health and Disability

The treatment received by those defined as mentally ill or disabled varies greatly from country to country. In the post-millennial United States, those of us who have never experienced such a disadvantage take for granted the rights our society guarantees for each citizen. We do not think about the relatively recent nature of the protections, unless, of course, we know someone constantly inconvenienced by the lack of accommodations or misfortune of suddenly experiencing a temporary disability.

## **Mental Health**

People with mental disorders (a condition that makes it more difficult to cope with everyday life) and people with mental illness (a severe, lasting mental disorder that requires long-term treatment) experience a wide range of effects.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the most common mental disorders in the United States are **anxiety disorders**. Almost 18% of U.S. adults are likely to be affected in a single year, and 28% are likely to be affected over the course of a lifetime (National Institute of Mental Health 2005). Anxiety disorders include obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and both social and specific phobias.

The second most common mental disorders in the United States are **mood disorders**; roughly 10% of U.S. adults are likely to be affected yearly, while 21% are likely to be affected over the course of a lifetime (National Institute of Mental Health 2005). Major mood disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, and dysthymic disorder. Like anxiety, depression might seem like something that everyone experiences at some point, and it is true that most people feel sad or “blue” at times in their lives. A true depressive episode, however, is more than just feeling sad for a short period. It is a long-term, debilitating illness that usually needs treatment to cure. And bipolar disorder is characterized by dramatic shifts in energy and mood, often affecting the individual’s ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. Bipolar disorder used to be called manic depression because of the way people would swing between manic and depressive episodes.

Depending on what definition is used, there is some overlap between mood disorders and **personality disorders**, which affect 9% of people in the United States yearly. The American Psychological Association publishes the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders* (DSM), and their definition of personality disorders is changing in the fifth edition, which is being revised in 2011 and 2012. After a multilevel review of proposed revisions, the American Psychiatric Association Board of Trustees ultimately decided to retain the DSM-IV categorical approach with the same ten personality disorders (paranoid personality disorder, schizoid personality disorder, schizotypal personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, histrionic personality, narcissistic personality disorder, avoidant personality disorder, dependent personality disorder and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder. In the *DSM-IV*, personality disorders represent “an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the culture of the individual who exhibits it” (National Institute of Mental Health). In other words, personality disorders cause people to behave in ways that are seen as abnormal to society but seem normal to them. The *DSM-V* proposes broadening this definition by offering five broad personality trait domains to describe personality disorders, some related to the level or type of their disconnect with society. As their application evolves, we will see how their definitions help scholars across disciplines understand the intersection of health issues and how they are defined by social institutions and cultural norms.



Medication is a common

option for children with ADHD. (Photo courtesy of Deviation56/Wikimedia Commons)

Another fairly commonly diagnosed mental disorder is Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (**ADHD**), which statistics suggest affects 9 percent of children and 8 percent of adults on a lifetime basis (National Institute of Mental Health 2005). ADHD is one of the most common childhood disorders, and it is marked by difficulty paying attention, difficulty controlling behavior, and hyperactivity. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), ADHD responds positively to stimulant drugs like Ritalin, which helps people stay focused. However, there is some social debate over whether such drugs are being overprescribed (American Psychological Association). In fact, some critics question whether this disorder is really as widespread as it seems, or if it is a case of over diagnosis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 5 percent of children have ADHD. However approximately 11 percent of children ages four through seventeen have been diagnosed with ADHD as of 2011.

**Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)** have gained a lot of attention in recent years. The term ASD encompasses a group of developmental brain disorders that are characterized by “deficits in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and engagement in repetitive behaviors or interests” (National Institute of Mental Health). As with the personality disorders described above, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders*’ description of these is in the process of being revised.

### **Medicalization in Critical Lens**

According to Conrad (2005), by the 1980s, some profound changes in organization of medicine had started. Managed care organizations, the pharmaceutical industry, and some kinds of physicians, such as psychiatrists, increasingly saw patients as consumers or potential markets.

Inventing diseases, marketing them, and then selling drugs and/or treatments for them have become common in the post-Prozac era. ADHD, which didn't exist 50 years ago, is now treated by drugs. Strong sexual desire is now called "hypersexual disorder" and treated by therapists (Reay et al. 2013). For profit motive, medicalization redefines bad behaviors, or even normal behaviors, as sick behaviors.

## Disability



The handicapped accessible sign indicates that people with disabilities can access the facility. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that access be provided to everyone. (Photo courtesy of Ltljltlj/Wikimedia Commons)

**Disability** refers to a reduction in one's ability to perform everyday tasks. The World Health Organization makes a distinction between the various terms used to describe handicaps that's important to the sociological perspective. They use the term **impairment** to describe the physical limitations, while reserving the term disability to refer to the social limitation.

Before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, people in the United States with disabilities were often excluded from opportunities and social institutions many of us take for granted. This occurred not only through employment and other kinds of discrimination but also through casual acceptance by most people in the United States of a world designed for the convenience of the able-bodied. Imagine being in a wheelchair and trying to use a sidewalk without the benefit of wheelchair-accessible curbs. Imagine as a blind person trying to access information without the widespread availability of Braille. Imagine having limited motor control and being faced with a difficult-to-grasp round door handle. Issues like these are what the ADA tries to address. Ramps on sidewalks, Braille instructions, and more accessible door levers are all accommodations to help people with disabilities.

As discussed in the section on mental health, many mental health disorders can be debilitating and can affect a person's ability to cope with everyday life. This can affect social status, housing, and especially employment. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), people with a disability had a higher rate of unemployment than people without a disability in 2010: 14.8 percent to 9.4 percent. This unemployment rate refers only to people actively looking for a job. In fact, eight out of ten people with a disability are considered "out of the labor force;" that is, they do not have jobs and are not looking for them. The combination of this population and the high unemployment rate leads to an employment-population ratio of 18.6 percent among those with disabilities. The employment-population ratio for people without disabilities was much higher, at 63.5 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).

**Note:**

Obesity: The Last Acceptable Prejudice



Obesity is considered the last acceptable social stigma. (Photo courtesy of Kyle May/flickr)

What is your reaction to the picture above? Compassion? Fear? Disgust? Many people will look at this picture and make negative assumptions about the man based on his weight. According to a study from the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, large people are the object of “widespread negative stereotypes that overweight and obese persons are lazy, unmotivated, lacking in self-discipline, less competent, noncompliant, and sloppy” (Puhl and Heuer 2009).

Historically, both in the United States and elsewhere, it was considered acceptable to discriminate against people based on prejudiced opinions. Even after slavery was abolished in 1865, the next 100 years of U.S. history saw institutionalized racism and prejudice against black people. In an example of **stereotype interchangeability**, the same insults that are flung today at the overweight and obese population (lazy, for instance), have been flung at various racial and ethnic groups in earlier history. Of course, no one gives voice to these kinds of views in public now, except when talking about obese people.

Why is it considered acceptable to feel prejudice toward—even to hate—obese people? Puhl and Heuer suggest that these feelings stem from the perception that obesity is preventable through self-control, better diet, and more exercise. Highlighting this contention is the fact that studies have

shown that people's perceptions of obesity are more positive when they think the obesity was caused by non-controllable factors like biology (a thyroid condition, for instance) or genetics.

Even with some understanding of non-controllable factors that might affect obesity, obese people are still subject to stigmatization. Puhl and Heuer's study is one of many that document discrimination at work, in the media, and even in the medical profession. Obese people are less likely to get into college than thinner people, and they are less likely to succeed at work.

Stigmatization of obese people comes in many forms, from the seemingly benign to the potentially illegal. In movies and television show, overweight people are often portrayed negatively, or as stock characters who are the butt of jokes. One study found that in children's movies "obesity was equated with negative traits (evil, unattractive, unfriendly, cruel) in 64 percent of the most popular children's videos. In 72 percent of the videos, characters with thin bodies had desirable traits, such as kindness or happiness" (Hines and Thompson 2007). In movies and television for adults, the negative portrayal is often meant to be funny. "Fat suits"—inflatable suits that make people look obese—are commonly used in a way that perpetuates negative stereotypes. Think about the way you have seen obese people portrayed in movies and on television; now think of any other subordinate group being openly denigrated in such a way. It is difficult to find a parallel example.

## Summary

Although people in the United States are generally in good health compared to less developed countries, the United States is still facing challenging issues such as a prevalence of obesity and diabetes. Moreover, people in the United States of historically disadvantaged racial groups, ethnicities, socioeconomic status, and gender experience lower levels of healthcare. Mental health and disability are health issues that are significantly impacted by social norms.

## Further Research

Is ADHD a valid diagnosis and disease? Some think it is not. This article discusses this history of the issue:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ADHD\\_controversy](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ADHD_controversy)

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## Glossary

**anxiety disorders**

feelings of worry and fearfulness that last for months at a time

**disability**

a reduction in one's ability to perform everyday tasks; the World Health Organization notes that this is a social limitation

**epidemiology**

the study of the incidence, distribution, and possible control of diseases

impairment

the physical limitations a less-able person faces

medicalization

the process by which aspects of life that were considered bad or deviant are redefined as sickness and needing medical attention to remedy

mood disorders

long-term, debilitating illnesses like depression and bipolar disorder

morbidity

the incidence of disease

mortality

the number of deaths in a given time or place

personality disorders

disorders that cause people to behave in ways that are seen as abnormal to society but seem normal to them

stereotype interchangeability

stereotypes that don't change and that get recycled for application to a new subordinate group

stigmatization

the act of spoiling someone's identity; they are labeled as different, discriminated against, and sometimes even shunned due to an illness or disability

## Comparative Health and Medicine

- Explain the different types of health care available in the United States
- Compare the health care system of the United States with that of other countries

There are broad, structural differences among the healthcare systems of different countries. In core nations, those differences might arise in the administration of healthcare, while the care itself is similar. In peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, a lack of basic healthcare administration can be the defining feature of the system. Most countries rely on some combination of modern and traditional medicine. In core countries with large investments in technology, research, and equipment, the focus is usually on modern medicine, with traditional (also called alternative or complementary) medicine playing a secondary role. In the United States, for instance, the American Medical Association (AMA) resolved to support the incorporation of complementary and alternative medicine in medical education. In developing countries, even quickly modernizing ones like China, traditional medicine (often understood as “complementary” by the western world) may still play a larger role.

## U.S. Healthcare

U.S. healthcare coverage can broadly be divided into two main categories: **public healthcare** (government-funded) and **private healthcare** (privately funded).

The former (government-funded healthcare) programs include Medicare and Medicaid. **Medicare** provides health services to people over sixty-five years old as well as people who meet other standards for disability. **Medicaid** provides services to people with very low incomes who meet other eligibility requirements. Other government-funded programs include service agencies focused on Native Americans (the Indian Health Service), Veterans (the Veterans Health Administration), and children (the Children’s Health Insurance Program).

A controversial issue in 2011 was a proposed constitutional amendment requiring a balanced federal budget, which would almost certainly require billions of dollars in cuts to these programs. As discussed below, the United States already has a significant problem with lack of healthcare coverage for many individuals; if these budget cuts pass, the already heavily burdened programs are sure to suffer, and so are the people they serve (Kogan 2011).



Following the hearing on the Medicare for All Act of 2019 in the Ways and Means Committee, the supporters including BMCC people demand "quality health care for everyone." June 12, 2019.

One of the major issues hotly debated for the U.S. presidential election 2020 is health care. Democratic candidates, and many BMCC people (see above), support what Senator Bernie Sanders calls Medicare for All--yes for "ALL," not just for people over sixty-five years old or those with disability. According to National Nurses United (NNU 2019), whose members love this idea (see above), argues that "Our health care system is broken. In the United States we pay more for our health care than any other country, and yet millions of people are uninsured or under-insured and can't get the lifesaving care they need. The Medicare for All Act of 2019 — H.R. 1384 in the House and S. 1804 in the Senate — would change all of that. It would expand our current Medicare system to provide high-quality, comprehensive health care to everyone!"

## ObamaCare

The Affordable Care Act (ACA), officially called The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and often called **ObamaCare**, is a US law that changed both the healthcare and health insurance industries in the U.S. Passed in 2010 and taking effect in 2014, ObamaCare required the vast majority of Americans to purchase health insurance coverage--although, thanks to the Trump administration, this mandatory rule and its penalty has been judged in 2018 to be invalid from the 2019 tax return on (which takes place in 2020).

One of the good things (functions) of ObamaCare is that insurance companies cannot dismiss applicants for their health status including pre-existing conditions. For the first time ever, the feds have the authority to require health insurers to accept all customers and offer them a specific set of health benefits.

Companies that have 50 or more full-time workers are required to pay the coverage for them. Small companies that had a little more than 50 workers seem to have reduced the number to below 50. Among small companies, indeed, 57% covered their employees in 2000, but it turned out to be 44% in 2014 (Manchikanti et al. 2017, p. 117).

Some complain that ObamaCare has made medical care, contrary of its purpose, less affordable because of increase in the cost of health insurance coupled with out-of-pocket expenses, including higher premiums, deductibles, and co-pay (Manchikanti 2017, p. 122). People in other developed countries even have never heard of the word "deductibles"--the amount of money a patient has to pay for expenses before his/her insurance plan starts to cover, and that restarts in each year--the rule that doesn't exist in those countries.

ObamaCare didn't reduce the percentage of the uninsured in the U.S. to 0%. Still 13% were uninsured even before President Trump repealed the mandatory rule. Who were they? Some can't afford coverage, which is too expensive to them, but don't qualify the subsidy. Some decided not to be covered and to, rather, pay the tax penalty, which is cheaper to them; they now appreciate President Trump. Also included in the uninsured are: the

homeless, the bankrupt, religious exemptions, prisoners, some Native Americans, and so on.

In the end of 2018, reacting to President Trump's appeal, a "federal judge in Texas struck down the entire Affordable Care Act on Friday on the grounds that its mandate requiring people to buy health insurance is unconstitutional and the rest of the law cannot stand without it" (The New York Times 2018). As an alternative to Obamacare, President Trump offers Trumpcare, while Senator Bernie Sanders calls for, as aforementioned, **Medicare for All**.

Sanders's idea is known as **socialized medicine**, which all other core nations have realized. Under a socialized medicine system, the government owns and runs the system, and hence, unlike in the U.S. that lacks such system, no one has to go bankrupt or die just because they can't pay the healthcare costs. The government employs the doctors, nurses, and other staff, and it owns and runs the hospitals (Klein 2009), using the tax money collected from the people. The examples of socialized medicine can be seen in all other core nations, such as England, where the National Health System (NHS) gives free healthcare to all its residents.

## **OECD Health Data: Social Protection**

Countries	Gov/Public Insurance	Private Insurance
U.S.A.	31.8	53.1
Luxemburg	97.2	0
Belgium	98.8	0
Turkey	99.5	0
Iceland	99.8	0.2
Austria	99.9	0
France	99.9	0
Netherlands	99.9	0
Spain	99.9	0
Australia	100	0
Canada	100	0
Denmark	100	0
Finland	100	0
Greece	100	0
Hungary	100	0
Ireland	100	0
Italy	100	0
Japan	100	0
Portugal	100	0
Sweden	100	0
Switzerland	100	0
United Kingdom	100	0

Source: OECD. 2013. OECD Health Data: Social Protection."

## Healthcare Elsewhere

Clearly, healthcare in the United States has some areas for improvement. But how does it compare to healthcare in other countries? Many people in the United States are fond of saying that this country has the best healthcare in the world, it is untrue when compared to other core nations and even to some peripheral nations. According to the World Health Organization (WHO 2000), as shown below, the U.S. healthcare quality is ranked at 37th in the world.

## WHO: World's Healthcare Qualities

1	France	21	Belgium
2	Italy	22	Colombia
3	San Marino	23	Sweden
4	Andorra	24	Cyprus
5	Malta	25	Germany
6	Singapore	26	Saudi Arabia
7	Spain	27	U.A. Emirates
8	Oman	28	Israel
9	Austria	29	Morocco
10	Japan	30	Canada
11	Norway	31	Finland
12	Portugal	32	Australia
13	Monaco	33	Chile
14	Greece	34	Denmark
15	Iceland	35	Dominica
16	Luxembourg	36	Costa Rica
17	Netherlands	37	U.S.A.
18	United Kingdom	38	Slovenia
19	Ireland	39	Cuba
20	Switzerland	40	Brunei

Source: The World Health Organization (WHO) 2000.

Heated discussions about socialization of medicine and managed-care options seem frivolous when compared with the issues of healthcare systems in developing or underdeveloped countries. In many countries, per capita income is so low, and governments are so fractured, that healthcare as we know it is virtually non-existent. Care that people in developed countries take for granted—like hospitals, healthcare workers, immunizations, antibiotics and other medications, and even sanitary water for drinking and washing—are unavailable to much of the population. Organizations like Doctors Without Borders, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization have played an important role in helping these countries get their most basic health needs met.

WHO, which is the health arm of the United Nations, set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 with the aim of reaching these goals by 2015. Some of the goals deal more broadly with the socioeconomic factors that influence health, but MDGs 4, 5, and 6 all relate specifically to large-scale health concerns, the likes of which most people in the United States will never contemplate. MDG 4 is to reduce child mortality, MDG 5 aims to improve maternal health, and MDG 6 strives to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. The goals may not seem particularly dramatic, but the numbers behind them show how serious they are.

For MDG 4, the WHO reports that 2009 infant mortality rates in “children under 5 years old in the WHO African Region (127 per 1000 live births)

and in low-income countries (117 per 1000 live births) [had dropped], but they were still higher than the 1990 global level of 89 per 1000 live births" (World Health Organization 2011). The fact that these deaths could have been avoided through appropriate medicine and clean drinking water shows the importance of healthcare.

Much progress has been made on MDG 5, with maternal deaths decreasing by 34 percent. However, almost all maternal deaths occurred in developing countries, with the African region still experiencing high numbers (World Health Organization 2011).

On MDG 6, the WHO is seeing some decreases in per capita incidence rates of malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases. However, the decreases are often offset by population increases (World Health Organization 2011). Again, the lowest-income countries, especially in the African region, experience the worst problems with disease. An important component of disease prevention and control is **epidemiology**, or the study of the incidence, distribution, and possible control of diseases. Fear of Ebola contamination, primarily in Western Africa but also to a smaller degree in the United States, became national news in the summer and fall of 2014.

## Summary

There are broad, structural differences among the healthcare systems of different countries. In core nations, those differences include publicly funded healthcare, privately funded healthcare, and combinations of both. In peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, a lack of basic healthcare administration can be the defining feature of the system.

## Further Research

Project Mosquito Net says that mosquito nets sprayed with insecticide can reduce childhood malaria deaths by half. Read more at

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/project\\_mosquito\\_net](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/project_mosquito_net)

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## **Glossary**

**individual mandate**

a government rule that requires everyone to have insurance coverage or they will have to pay a penalty

**private healthcare**

health insurance that a person buys from a private company; private healthcare can either be employer-sponsored or direct-purchase

**public healthcare**

health insurance that is funded or provided by the government

**socialized medicine**

when the government owns and runs the entire healthcare system

**underinsured**

people who spend at least 10 percent of their income on healthcare costs that are not covered by insurance

**universal healthcare**

a system that guarantees healthcare coverage for everyone

## Theoretical Perspectives on Health and Medicine

- Apply functionalist, conflict theorist, and interactionist perspectives to health issues

Each of the three major theoretical perspectives approaches the topics of health, illness, and medicine differently. You may prefer just one of the theories that follow, or you may find that combining theories and perspectives provides a fuller picture of how we experience health and wellness.

### Functionalism

According to the functionalist perspective, health is vital to the stability of the society, and therefore sickness is a sanctioned form of deviance. Talcott Parsons (1951) was the first to discuss this in terms of the **sick role**: patterns of expectations that define appropriate behavior for the sick and for those who take care of them.

According to Parsons, the sick person has a specific role with both rights and responsibilities. To start with, she has not chosen to be sick and should not be treated as responsible for her condition. The sick person also has the right of being exempt from normal social roles; she is not required to fulfill the obligation of a well person and can avoid her normal responsibilities without censure. However, this exemption is temporary and relative to the severity of the illness. The exemption also requires **legitimation** by a physician; that is, a physician must certify that the illness is genuine.

The responsibility of the sick person is twofold: to try to get well and to seek technically competent help from a physician. If the sick person stays ill longer than is appropriate (malingers), she may be stigmatized.

Parsons argues that since the sick are unable to fulfill their normal societal roles, their sickness weakens the society. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary for various forms of social control to bring the behavior of a sick person back in line with normal expectations. In this model of health, doctors serve as gatekeepers, deciding who is healthy and who is sick—a

relationship in which the doctor has all the power. But is it appropriate to allow doctors so much power over deciding who is sick? And what about people who are sick, but are unwilling to leave their positions for any number of reasons (personal/social obligations, financial need, or lack of insurance, for instance).

## Conflict Perspective

Theorists using the conflict perspective suggest that issues with the healthcare system, as with most other social problems, are rooted in capitalist society. According to conflict theorists, capitalism and the pursuit of profit lead to the **commodification** of health: the changing of something not generally thought of as a commodity into something that can be bought and sold in a marketplace. In this view, people with money and power—the dominant group—are the ones who make decisions about how the healthcare system will be run. They therefore ensure that they will have healthcare coverage, while simultaneously ensuring that subordinate groups stay subordinate through lack of access. This creates significant healthcare—and health—disparities between the dominant and subordinate groups.

Alongside the health disparities created by class inequalities, there are a number of health disparities created by racism, sexism, ageism, and heterosexism. When health is a commodity, the poor are more likely to experience illness caused by poor diet, to live and work in unhealthy environments, and are less likely to challenge the system. In the United States, a disproportionate number of racial minorities also have less economic power, so they bear a great deal of the burden of poor health. It is not only the poor who suffer from the conflict between dominant and subordinate groups. For many years now, homosexual couples have been denied spousal benefits, either in the form of health insurance or in terms of medical responsibility. Further adding to the issue, doctors hold a disproportionate amount of power in the doctor/patient relationship, which provides them with extensive social and economic benefits.

While conflict theorists are accurate in pointing out certain inequalities in the healthcare system, they do not give enough credit to medical advances that would not have been made without an economic structure to support

and reward researchers: a structure dependent on profitability. Additionally, in their criticism of the power differential between doctor and patient, they are perhaps dismissive of the hard-won medical expertise possessed by doctors and not patients, which renders a truly egalitarian relationship more elusive.

## Symbolic Interactionism

According to theorists working in this perspective, health and illness are both socially constructed. As we discussed in the beginning of the chapter, interactionists focus on the specific meanings and causes people attribute to illness. The term **medicalization of deviance** refers to the process that changes “bad” behavior into “sick” behavior. A related process is **demedicalization**, in which “sick” behavior is normalized again. Medicalization and demedicalization affect who responds to the patient, how people respond to the patient, and how people view the personal responsibility of the patient (Conrad and Schneider 1992).



In this engraving from the nineteenth century, “King Alcohol” is shown with a skeleton on a

barrel of alcohol.

The words  
“poverty,” “misery,”  
“crime,” and  
“death” hang in the  
air behind him.  
(Photo courtesy of  
the Library of  
Congress/Wikimedi  
a Commons)

An example of medicalization is illustrated by the history of how our society views alcohol and alcoholism. During the nineteenth century, people who drank too much were considered bad, lazy people. They were called drunks, and it was not uncommon for them to be arrested or run out of a town. Drunks were not treated in a sympathetic way because, at that time, it was thought that it was their own fault that they could not stop drinking. During the latter half of the twentieth century, however, people who drank too much were increasingly defined as alcoholics: people with a disease or a genetic predisposition to addiction who were not responsible for their drinking. With alcoholism defined as a disease and not a personal choice, alcoholics came to be viewed with more compassion and understanding. Thus, “badness” was transformed into “sickness.”

There are numerous examples of demedicalization in history as well. During the Civil War era, slaves who frequently ran away from their owners were diagnosed with a mental disorder called *drapetomania*. This has since been reinterpreted as a completely appropriate response to being enslaved. A more recent example is homosexuality, which was labeled a mental disorder or a sexual orientation disturbance by the American Psychological Association until 1973.

While interactionism does acknowledge the subjective nature of diagnosis, it is important to remember who most benefits when a behavior becomes defined as illness. Pharmaceutical companies make billions treating

illnesses such as fatigue, insomnia, and hyperactivity that may not actually be illnesses in need of treatment, but opportunities for companies to make more money.

## Summary

While the functionalist perspective looks at how health and illness fit into a fully functioning society, the conflict perspective is concerned with how health and illness fit into the oppositional forces in society. The interactionist perspective is concerned with how social interactions construct ideas of health and illness.

## Further Research

Should alcoholism and other addictions be medicalized? Read and watch a dissenting view: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/addiction\\_medicalization](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/addiction_medicalization)

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## Glossary

### commodification

the changing of something not generally thought of as a commodity into something that can be bought and sold in a marketplace

### demedicalization

the social process that normalizes “sick” behavior

legitimation

the act of a physician certifying that an illness is genuine

medicalization of deviance

the process that changes “bad” behavior into “sick” behavior

sick role

the pattern of expectations that define appropriate behavior for the sick and for those who take care of them

## Demography and Population

- Understand demographic measurements like fertility and mortality rates
- Describe a variety of demographic theories, such as Malthusian, cornucopian, zero population growth, and demographic transition theories
- Be familiar with current population trends and patterns
- Understand the difference between an internally displaced person, an asylum-seeker, and a refugee



At over 7 billion, Earth's population is always on the move. (Photo courtesy of David Sim/flickr)

Between 2011 and 2012, we reached a population milestone of 7 billion humans on the earth's surface. The rapidity with which this happened demonstrated an exponential increase from the time it took to grow from 5 billion to 6 billion people. In short, the planet is filling up. How quickly will we go from 7 billion to 8 billion? How will that population be distributed? Where is population the highest? Where is it slowing down? Where will people live? To explore these questions, we turn to **demography**, or the study of populations. Three of the most important components that affect the issues above are fertility, mortality, and migration.

The **fertility rate** of a society is a measure noting the number of children born. Demographers measure fertility using the crude birthrate (the number of live births per 1,000 people per year).

Just as fertility measures childbearing, the **mortality rate** is a measure of the number of people who die. The crude death rate is a number derived from the number of deaths per 1,000 people per year.

Another key element in studying populations is the movement of people into and out of an area. In addition to the "fertility rate" and the "mortality rate," demographers use the **net migration rate**, the number of people coming in minus that of people getting out of the country, as a major factor that affects the population fluctuation (or increase/decrease).

**Note:**

**The 2014 Child Migration Crisis**

Children have always contributed to the total number of migrants crossing the southern border of the United States illegally, but in 2014, a steady overall increase in unaccompanied minors from Central America reached crisis proportions when tens of thousands of children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras crossed the Rio Grande and overwhelmed border patrols and local infrastructure (Dart 2014).

Since legislators passed the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 in the last days of the Bush administration, unaccompanied minors from countries that do not share a border with the United States are guaranteed a hearing with an immigration judge where they may request asylum based on a "credible" fear of persecution or torture (U.S. Congress 2008). In some cases, these children are looking for relatives and can be placed with family while awaiting a hearing on their immigration status; in other cases they are held in processing centers until the Department of Health and Human Services makes other arrangements (Popescu 2014).

The 2014 surge placed such a strain on state resources that Texas began transferring the children to Immigration and Naturalization facilities in California and elsewhere, without incident for the most part. On July 1, 2014, however, buses carrying the migrant children were blocked by

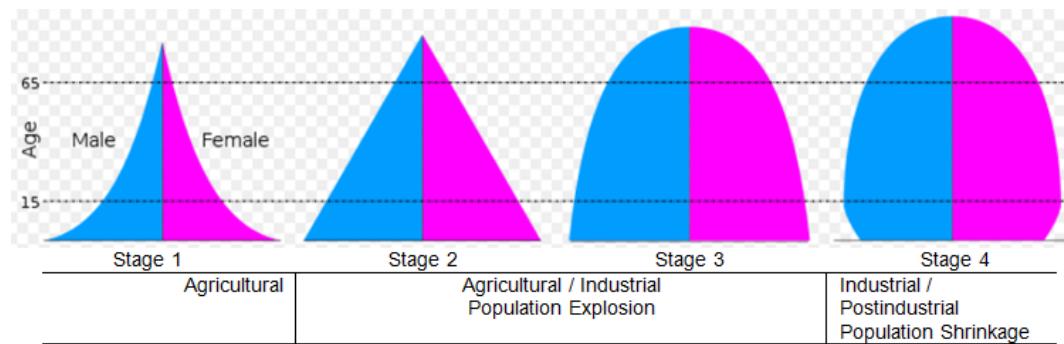
protesters in Murrietta, California, who chanted, "Go home" and "We don't want you." (Fox News and Associated Press 2014; Reyes 2014).

Given the fact that these children are fleeing various kinds of violence and extreme poverty, how should the U.S. government respond? Should the government pass laws granting a general amnesty? Or should it follow a zero-tolerance policy, automatically returning any and all unaccompanied minor migrants to their countries of origin so as to discourage additional immigration that will stress the already overwhelmed system?

A functional perspective theorist might focus on the dysfunctions caused by the sudden influx of underage asylum seekers, while a conflict perspective theorist might look at the way social stratification influences how the members of a developed country are treating the lower-status migrants from less-developed countries in Latin America. An interactionist theorist might see significance in the attitude of the Murrietta protesters toward the migrant children. Which theoretical perspective makes the most sense to you?

# Population Growth

Changing fertility, mortality, and migration rates make up the total population composition, a snapshot of the demographic profile of a population. This number can be measured for societies, nations, world regions, or other groups. The population composition shapes the **population pyramid**, a picture of population distribution by sex and age ([\[link\]](#)).



Source: NikNaks93

The typical shapes of the population pyramids of agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial societies (Source: NikNaks93)

In Stage 1, the number of children is large, but people die young, and the number of the elderly is very small. In Stage 2, death rates decrease, but birth rates remain to be high, and the population begin increasing (**population explosion**). This is a typical problem shared among peripheral nations that have scarce resources.

In Stage 3, death rates remain to be low, but birth rates decline, and the population growth begins slowing down. In Stage 4, although people live way longer than before, as the number of children becomes extremely low, the population can shrink (**population shrinkage**). This is a typical problem among core nations; the "dependency ratio" is too big. The United States, a giant core nation, is an exception; immigrants from peripheral nations tend to have a large number of children.

## Demographic Theories

Sociologists have long looked at population issues as central to understanding human interactions. Below we will look at four theories about population that inform sociological thought: Malthusian, zero population growth, cornucopian, and demographic transition theories.

### Malthusian Theory

Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) was an English clergyman who made dire predictions about earth's ability to sustain its growing population. According to **Malthusian theory**, there are two different groups of factors that can control human population. One is called "positive checks" and the other, "preventive checks."

The **positive checks** include war, famine, and disease; they control the population by increasing mortality rates (Malthus 1798). The **preventive checks** include contraception and celibacy; they control the population by decreasing fertility rates.

Overall, Malthus viewed that people could produce only limited amount of **food** in a given year, yet the **population** was increasing at an exponential rate. Eventually, he thought, people would run out of food and begin to starve. They would go to war (a positive check) over resources and, as a result, reduce the population to a manageable level, and then the cycle would begin anew.

Of course, this has not exactly happened (see the population pyramid above and anti-Malthusian theory below).

## Zero Population Growth

A neo-Malthusian researcher named Paul Ehrlich brought Malthus's predictions into the twentieth century. However, according to Ehrlich, it is the environment, not specifically the food supply, that will play a crucial role in the continued health of planet's population (Ehrlich 1968). Ehrlich's ideas suggest that the human population is moving rapidly toward complete environmental collapse, as privileged people use up or pollute a number of environmental resources such as water and air. He advocated for a goal of **zero population growth** (ZPG), in which the number of people entering a population through birth or immigration is equal to the number of people leaving it via death or emigration. While support for this concept is mixed, it is still considered a possible solution to global overpopulation.

## Cornucopian Theory

Of course, some theories are less focused on the pessimistic hypothesis that the world's population will meet a detrimental challenge to sustaining itself. **Cornucopian theory** scoffs at the idea of humans wiping themselves out; it

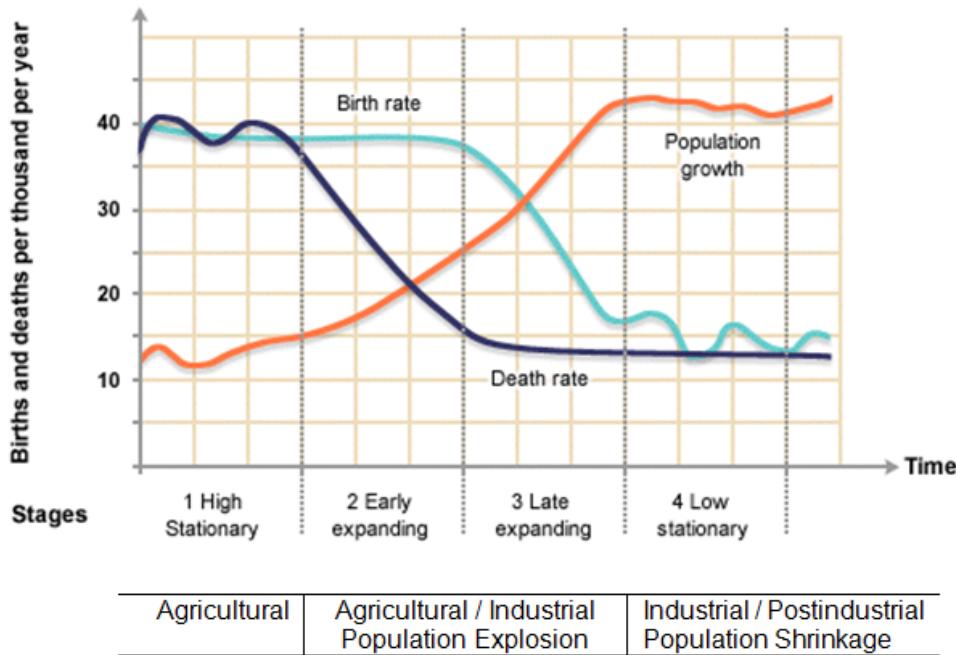
asserts that human ingenuity can resolve any environmental or social issues that develop. As an example, it points to the issue of food supply. If we need more food, the theory contends, agricultural scientists will figure out how to grow it, as they have already been doing for centuries. After all, in this perspective, human ingenuity has been up to the task for thousands of years and there is no reason for that pattern not to continue (Simon 1981).

### **Demographic Transition (Anti-Malthusian) Theory**

Whether you believe that we are headed for environmental disaster and the end of human existence as we know it, or you think people will always adapt to changing circumstances, we can see clear patterns in population growth. Societies develop along a predictable continuum as they evolve from unindustrialized to postindustrial.

**Demographic transition theory** (Caldwell and Caldwell 2006) suggests that future population growth will develop along a predictable four-stage model. Instead of the food supply, this theory points to the fluctuation of the birth rate and the death rate that depends, to a great extent, on the shifting mode of economy.

### **Demographic Transition (Anti-Malthusian) Theory**

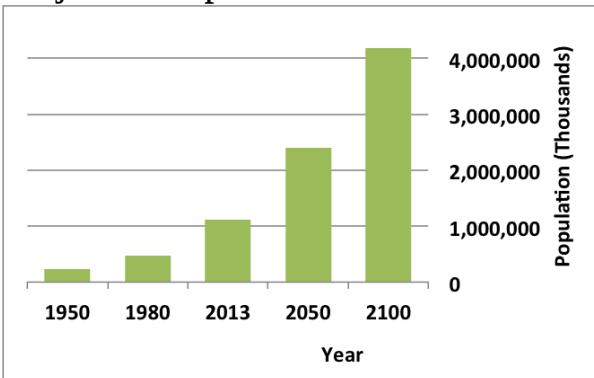


- Stage 1: In agricultural societies, birth, death, and infant mortality rates are all high, while life expectancy is short.
- Stage 2: When societies are being industrialized, although birth rates remain to be high, infant mortality and death rates drop, and life expectancy increases.
- Stage 3: In highly industrialized societies, both birth and death rates decline, while life expectancy continues to increase, and the population growth eventually stops.
- Stage 4: In postindustrial societies, death rates become even lower, and people live longer, but as birth rates sharply decline, overall population begins shrinking.

The United Nations Population Fund (2008) categorizes nations as high fertility, intermediate fertility, or low fertility. The United Nations (UN) anticipates the population growth will triple between 2011 and 2100 in high-fertility countries, which are currently concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa. For countries with intermediate fertility rates (the United States, India, and Mexico all fall into this category), growth is expected to be about 26% (population explosion). And low-fertility countries like Japan, Australia, and most of Europe will actually see population declines of approximately 20% (population shrinkage).

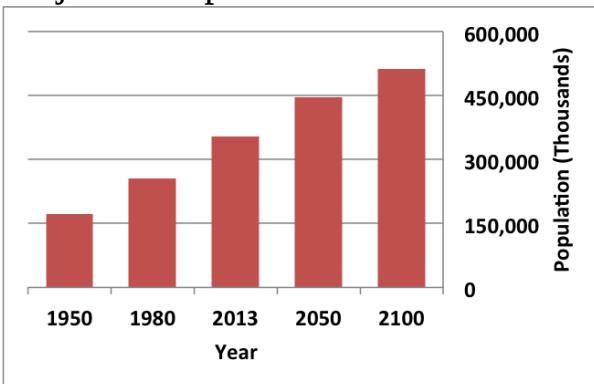
# Changes in U.S. Immigration Patterns and Attitudes

## Projected Population in Africa



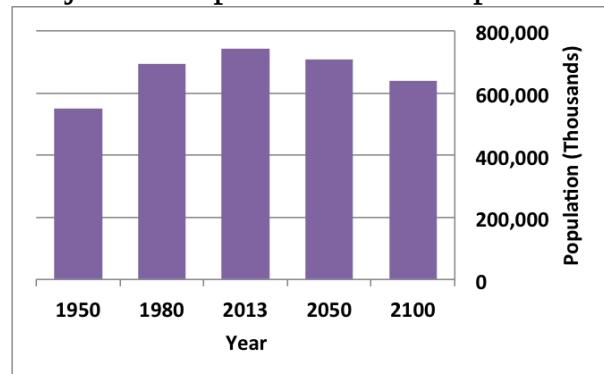
This graph shows the population growth of countries located on the African continent, many of which have high fertility rates. (Graph courtesy of USAID)

## Projected Population in the United States



The United States has an intermediate fertility rate, and therefore, a comparatively moderate projected population growth. (Graph courtesy of USAID)

## Projected Population in Europe



This chart shows the projected population growth of Europe for the remainder of this century.  
(Graph courtesy of USAID)

Worldwide patterns of migration have changed, though the United States remains the most popular destination. From 1990 to 2013, the number of migrants living in the United States increased from one in six to one in five (The Pew Research Center 2013). Overall, in 2013 the United States was home to about 46 million foreign-born people, while only about 3 million U.S. citizens lived abroad. Of foreign-born citizens emigrating to the United States, 55 percent originated in Latin America and the Caribbean (Connor, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2013).

While there are more foreign-born people residing in the United States legally, as of 2012 about 11.7 million resided here without legal status (Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2013). Most citizens agree that our national immigration policies are in need major adjustment. Almost three-quarters of those in a recent national survey believed illegal immigrants should have a path to citizenship provided they meet other requirements, such as speaking English or paying restitution for the time they spent in the country illegally. Interestingly, 55 percent of those surveyed who identified as Hispanic think a pathway to citizenship is of secondary importance to

provisions for living legally in the United States without the threat of deportation (The Pew Research Center 2013).

## Summary

Scholars understand demography through various analyses. Malthusian, zero population growth, cornucopian theory, and demographic transition theories all help sociologists study demography. The earth's human population is growing quickly, especially in peripheral countries. Factors that impact population include birthrates, mortality rates, and migration, including immigration and emigration. There are numerous potential outcomes of the growing population, and sociological perspectives vary on the potential effect of these increased numbers. The growth will pressure the already taxed planet and its natural resources.

## Further Research

To learn more about population concerns, from the new-era ZPG advocates to the United Nations reports, check out these links:

[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/population\\_connection](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/population_connection) and

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/un-population>

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## Glossary

carrying capacity

the amount of people that can live in a given area considering the amount of available resources

**cornucopian theory**

a theory that asserts human ingenuity will rise to the challenge of providing adequate resources for a growing population

**demographic transition theory**

a theory that describes four stages of population growth, following patterns that connect birth and death rates with stages of industrial development

**demography**

the study of population

**fertility rate**

a measure noting the actual number of children born

**Malthusian theory**

a theory asserting that population is controlled through positive checks (war, famine, disease) and preventive checks (measures to reduce fertility)

**mortality rate**

a measure of the number of people in a population who die

**population composition**

a snapshot of the demographic profile of a population based on fertility, mortality, and migration rates

**population pyramid**

a graphic representation that depicts population distribution according to age and sex

**sex ratio**

the ratio of men to women in a given population

**zero population growth**

a theoretical goal in which the number of people entering a population through birth or immigration is equal to the number of people leaving it via death or emigration

## Urbanization

- Describe the process of urbanization in the United States and the growth of urban populations worldwide
- Understand the function of suburbs, exurbs, and concentric zones
- Discuss urbanization from various sociological perspectives



Image: ahundt/public domain

New York City is an iconic image of city life.  
(Photo courtesy of flickr)

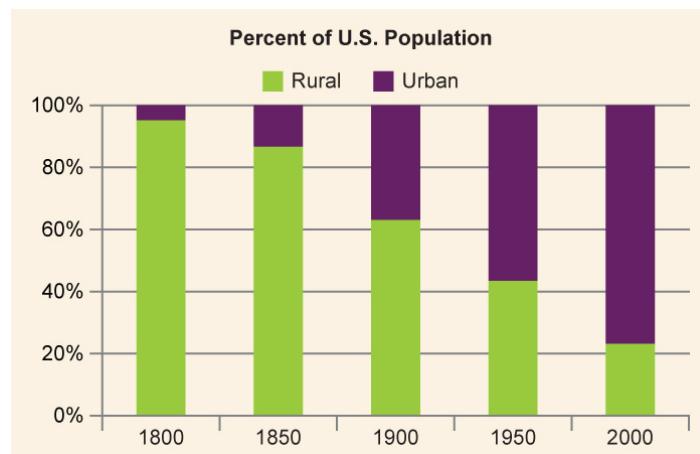
**Urbanization** is the process through which rural areas are shifting toward urban areas. An urban area will comprise a densely settled core of census tracts and/or census blocks that meet minimum population density requirements (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas: (1) Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people and (2) Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.

Urban sociology studies such process, focusing on various issues related to it. Urban areas, by definition, have dense populations, and people placed closely to each other in such areas are diverse in terms of many aspects, such as values and norms, race/ethnicity, religion, education, occupation, income, political orientation, and so on. This inevitably diverse characteristic of urban areas (related to **organic solidarity** as opposed to

**mechanical solidarity** [see Chapter 5, Society and Social Interaction]) yields a variety of issues. Racism is one thing, class issue is another, and crime rates often positively linked to such situations may be still another...

## The Growth of Cities

According to sociologist Gideon Sjoberg (1965), there are three prerequisites for the development of a city: First, good environment with clean water and a favorable climate; second, advanced technology, which will produce a food surplus to support nonfarmers; and third, strong social organization to ensure social stability and a stable economy. The earliest cities were small by today's standards, and the largest was most likely Rome, with about 650,000 inhabitants (Chandler and Fox 1974). The factors limiting the size of ancient cities included lack of adequate sewage control, limited food supply, and immigration restrictions. Indeed, farmers were tied to the land, and transportation was limited and inefficient. Today, the primary influence on cities' growth is economic forces. Unlike small folk villages, strangers (or immigrants) have chances to get a job in big cities.



As this chart illustrates, the shift from rural to urban living in the United States has been dramatic and

continuous. (Graph courtesy of the U.S. Census Bureau)

## Urbanization in the United States

Urbanization in the United States proceeded rapidly during the Industrial Era. As more and more opportunities for work appeared in factories, workers left farms (and the rural communities that housed them) to move to the cities. From mill towns in Massachusetts to tenements in New York, the industrial era saw an influx of poor workers into U.S. cities. At various times throughout the country's history, certain demographic groups, from post-Civil War southern Blacks to more recent immigrants, have made their way to urban centers to seek a better life in the city.

## Suburbs and Exurbs

As cities grew more crowded, and often more impoverished and costly, more and more people began to migrate back out of them. But instead of returning to rural small towns (like they'd resided in before moving to the city), these people needed close access to the cities for their jobs. In the 1850s, as the urban population greatly expanded and transportation options improved, suburbs developed. **Suburbs** are the communities surrounding cities, typically close enough for a daily commute in, but far enough away to allow for more space than city living affords. The bucolic suburban landscape of the early twentieth century has largely disappeared due to sprawl. Suburban sprawl contributes to traffic congestion, which in turn contributes to commuting time. And commuting times and distances have continued to increase as new suburbs developed farther and farther from city centers. Simultaneously, this dynamic contributed to an exponential increase in natural resource use, like petroleum, which sequentially increased pollution in the form of carbon emissions.

As the suburbs became more crowded and lost their charm, those who could afford it turned to the **exurbs**, communities that exist outside the ring of suburbs and are typically populated by even wealthier families who want

more space and have the resources to lengthen their commute. Together, the suburbs, exurbs, and metropolitan areas all combine to form a **metropolis**. New York was the first U.S. **megalopolis**, a huge urban corridor encompassing multiple cities and their surrounding suburbs. These metropolises use vast quantities of natural resources and are a growing part of the U.S. landscape.



The suburban sprawl in Toronto means long commutes and traffic congestion. (Photo courtesy of Payon Chung/flickr)

**Note:**

**Suburbs Are Not All White Picket Fences: The Banlieues of Paris**

What makes a suburb a suburb? Simply, a suburb is a community surrounding a city. But when you picture a suburb in your mind, your image may vary widely depending on which nation you call home. In the United States, most consider the suburbs home to upper—and middle—class people with private homes. In other countries, like France, the suburbs—or “banlieues”—are synonymous with housing projects and

impoverished communities. In fact, the banlieues of Paris are notorious for their ethnic violence and crime, with higher unemployment and more residents living in poverty than in the city center. Further, the banlieues have a much higher immigrant population, which in Paris is mostly Arabic and African immigrants. This contradicts the clichéd U.S. image of a typical white-picket-fence suburb.

In 2005, serious riots broke out in the banlieue of Clichy-sous-Bois after two boys were electrocuted while hiding from the police. They were hiding, it is believed, because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, near the scene of a break-in, and they were afraid the police would not believe in their innocence. Only a few days earlier, interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy (who later became president), had given a speech touting new measures against urban violence and referring to the people of the banlieue as “rabble” (BBC 2005). After the deaths and subsequent riots, Sarkozy reiterated his zero-tolerance policy toward violence and sent in more police. Ultimately, the violence spread across more than thirty towns and cities in France. Thousands of cars were burned, many hundreds of people were arrested, and both police and protesters suffered serious injuries.

Then-President Jacques Chirac responded by pledging more money for housing programs, jobs programs, and education programs to help the banlieues solve the underlying problems that led to such disastrous unrest. But none of the newly launched programs were effective. Sarkozy ran for president on a platform of tough regulations toward young offenders, and in 2007 the country elected him. More riots ensued as a response to his election. In 2010, Sarkozy promised “war without mercy” against the crime in the banlieues (France24 2010). Six years after the Clichy-sous-Bois riot, circumstances are no better for those in the banlieues.

As the Social Policy & Debate feature illustrates, the suburbs also have their share of socio-economic problems. In the United States, **white flight** refers to the migration of economically secure white people from racially mixed urban areas and toward the suburbs. This occurred throughout the twentieth century, due to causes as diverse as the legal end of racial segregation established by *Brown v. Board of Education* to the Mariel

boatlift of Cubans fleeing Cuba's Mariel port for Miami. Current trends include middle-class African-American families following white flight patterns out of cities, while affluent whites return to cities that have historically had a black majority. The result is that the issues of race, socio-economics, neighborhoods, and communities remain complicated and challenging.

## Urbanization around the World

During the Industrial Era, there was a growth spurt worldwide. The development of factories brought people from rural to urban areas, and new technology increased the efficiency of transportation, food production, and food preservation. For example, from the mid-1670s to the early 1900s, London's population increased from 550,000 to 7 million (Old Bailey Proceedings Online 2011). Global favorites like New York, London, and Tokyo are all examples of postindustrial cities. As cities evolve from manufacturing-based industrial to service- and information-based postindustrial societies, gentrification becomes more common.

**Gentrification** occurs when members of the middle and upper classes enter and renovate city areas that have been historically less affluent while the poor urban underclass are forced by resulting price pressures to leave those neighborhoods for increasingly decaying portions of the city.

Globally, 54 percent of the world's 7 billion people currently reside in urban areas, with the most urbanized region being North America (82 percent), followed by Latin America/the Caribbean (80 percent), with Europe coming in third (72 percent). In comparison, Africa is only 40 percent urbanized. With 38 million people, Tokyo is the world's largest city by population. The world's most densely populated cities are now largely concentrated in the global south, a marked change from several decades ago when the biggest cities were found in the global north. In the next forty years, the biggest global challenge for urbanized populations, particularly in less developed countries, will be to achieve development that occurs without depleting or damaging the natural environment, also called **sustainable development** (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division 2014).

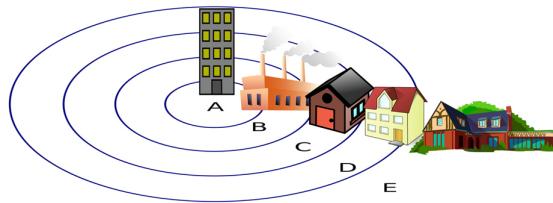
## Theoretical Perspectives on Urbanization

The issues of urbanization play significant roles in the study of sociology. Race, economics, and human behavior intersect in cities. Let's look at urbanization through the sociological perspectives of functionalism and conflict theory. Functional perspectives on urbanization generally focus on the ecology of the city, while conflict perspective tends to focus on political economy.

**Human ecology** is a functionalist field of study that looks at on the relationship between people and their built and natural physical environments (Park 1915). Generally speaking, urban land use and urban population distribution occur in a predictable pattern once we understand how people relate to their living environment. For example, in the United States, we have a transportation system geared to accommodate individuals and families in the form of interstate highways built for cars. In contrast, most parts of Europe emphasize public transportation such as high-speed rail and commuter lines, as well as walking and bicycling. The challenge for a human ecologist working in U.S. urban planning is to design landscapes and waterscapes with natural beauty, while also figuring out how to provide for free-flowing transport of innumerable vehicles, not to mention parking!

The **concentric zone model** (Burgess 1925) is perhaps the most famous example of human ecology. This model views a city as a series of concentric circular areas, expanding outward from the center of the city, with various “zones” invading adjacent zones (as new categories of people and businesses overrun the edges of nearby zones) and succeeding (then after invasion, the new inhabitants repurpose the areas they have invaded and push out the previous inhabitants). In this model, Zone A, in the heart of the city, is the center of the business and cultural district. Zone B, the concentric circle surrounding the city center, is composed of formerly wealthy homes split into cheap apartments for new immigrant populations; this zone also houses small manufacturers, pawn shops, and other marginal businesses. Zone C consists of the homes of the working class and established ethnic enclaves. Zone D holds wealthy homes, white-collar

workers, and shopping centers. Zone E contains the estates of the upper class (in the exurbs) and the suburbs.



This illustration depicts the zones that make up a city in the concentric zone model. (Photo courtesy of Zeimusu/Wikimedia Commons)

In contrast to the functionalist approach, theoretical models in the conflict perspective focus on the way urban areas change according to specific decisions made by political and economic leaders. These decisions generally benefit the middle and upper classes while exploiting the working and lower classes.

For example, sociologists Feagin and Parker (1990) suggested three factors by which political and economic leaders control urban growth. First, these leaders work alongside each other to influence urban growth and decline, determining where money flows and how land use is regulated. Second, exchange value and use value of land are balanced to favor the middle and upper classes so that, for example, public land in poor neighborhoods may be rezoned for use as industrial land. Finally, urban development is dependent on both structure (groups such as local government) and agency (individuals including businessmen and activists), and these groups engage in a push-pull dynamic that determines where and how land is actually used. For example, Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) movements are more likely to emerge in middle and upper-class neighborhoods as engaged

citizens protest poor environmental practices they fear will affect them, so these groups have more control over the use of local land.

## Summary

Cities provide numerous opportunities for their residents and offer significant benefits including access to goods to numerous job opportunities. At the same time, high population areas can lead to tensions between demographic groups, as well as environmental strain. While the population of urban dwellers is continuing to rise, sources of social strain are rising along with it. The ultimate challenge for today's urbanites is finding an equitable way to share the city's resources while reducing the pollution and energy use that negatively impacts the environment.

## Further Research

Interested in learning more about the latest research in the field of human ecology? Visit the Society for Human Ecology web site to discover what's emerging in this field: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human\\_ecology](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/human_ecology)

Getting from place to place in urban areas might be more complicated than you think. Read the latest on pedestrian-traffic concerns at the Urban Blog web site: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/pedestrian\\_traffic](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/pedestrian_traffic)

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## Glossary

**asylum-seekers**

those whose claim to refugee status have not been validated

**concentric zone model**

a model of human ecology that views cities as a series of circular rings or zones

**exurbs**

communities that arise farther out than the suburbs and are typically populated by residents of high socioeconomic status

**gentrification**

the entry of upper- and middle-class residents to city areas or communities that have been historically less affluent

**human ecology**

a functional perspective that looks at the relationship between people and their built and natural environment

**internally displaced person**

someone who fled his or her home while remaining inside the country's borders

**megalopolis**

a large urban corridor that encompasses several cities and their surrounding suburbs and exurbs

**metropolis**

the area that includes a city and its suburbs and exurbs

**refugee**

an individual who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster

**suburbs**

the communities surrounding cities, typically close enough for a daily commute

**sustainable development**

development that occurs without depleting or damaging the natural environment

**urban sociology**

the subfield of sociology that focuses on the study of urbanization

**urbanization**

the study of the social, political, and economic relationships of cities

**white flight**

the migration of economically secure white people from racially mixed urban areas toward the suburbs

## The Environment and Society

- Describe climate change and its importance
- Apply the concept of carrying capacity to environmental concerns
- Understand the challenges presented by pollution, garbage, e-waste, and toxic hazards
- Discuss real-world instances of environmental racism

The **environmental sociology** studies the way humans interact with their environments. This field is closely related to human ecology, which focuses on the relationship between people and their built and natural environments. This is an area that is garnering more attention as extreme weather patterns and policy battles over climate change dominate the news. A key factor of environmental sociology is the concept of carrying capacity, which describes the maximum amount of life that can be sustained within a given area. While this concept can refer to grazing lands or to rivers, we can also apply it to the earth as a whole.



Too little land for grazing  
means starving cattle.

(Photo courtesy of  
newbeatphoto/flickr)

### Note:

The Tragedy of the Commons

You might have heard the expression “the tragedy of the commons.” In 1968, an article of the same title written by Garrett Hardin described how a common pasture was ruined by overgrazing. But Hardin was not the first to notice the phenomenon. Back in the 1800s, Oxford economist William Forster Lloyd looked at the devastated public grazing commons and the unhealthy cattle subject to such limited resources, and saw, in essence, that the carrying capacity of the commons had been exceeded. However, since no one was held responsible for the land (as it was open to all), no one was willing to make sacrifices to improve it. Cattle grazers benefitted from adding more cattle to their herds, but they did not have to take on the responsibility of the lands that were being damaged by overgrazing. So there was an incentive for them to add more head of cattle, and no incentive for restraint.

Satellite photos of Africa taken in the 1970s showed this practice to dramatic effect. The images depicted a dark irregular area of more than 300 square miles. There was a large fenced area, where plenty of grass was growing. Outside the fence, the ground was bare and devastated. The reason was simple: the fenced land was privately owned by informed farmers who carefully rotated their grazing animals and allowed the fields to lie fallow periodically. Outside the fence was land used by nomads. Like the herdsmen in 1800s Oxford, the nomads increased their heads of cattle without planning for its impact on the greater good. The soil eroded, the plants died, then the cattle died, and, ultimately, some of the people died. How does this lesson affect those of us who don’t need to graze our cattle? Well, like the cows, we all need food, water, and clean air to survive. With the increasing world population and the ever-larger megalopolises with tens of millions of people, the limit of the earth’s carrying capacity is called into question. When too many take while giving too little thought to the rest of the population, whether cattle or humans, the result is usually tragedy.

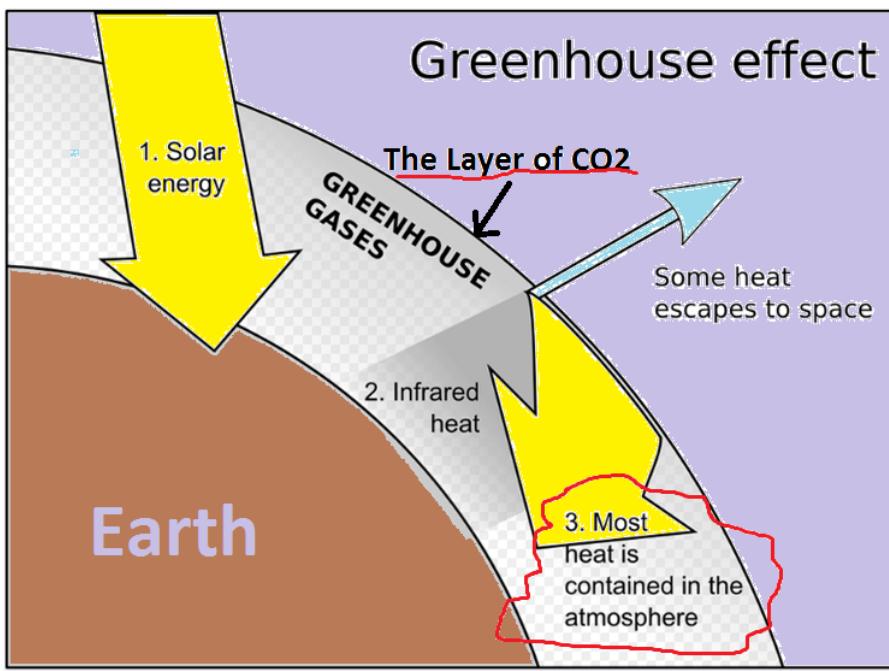
## Climate Change

While you might be more familiar with the phrase “global warming,” **climate change** is the term now used to refer to long-term shifts in

temperatures due to human activity and, in particular, the release of greenhouse gases (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the environment. The planet as a whole is warming, but the term climate change acknowledges that the short-term variations in this process can include both higher and lower temperatures, despite the overarching trend toward warmth.

There are many problems resulting from climate change, such as melting glaciers that raise the sea level, changing ecosystems that exterminate various species, increased precipitation (rain) and hurricanes that devastate our living environments, and so forth. For example, in August, 2018, Hurricane Harvey dumped a record-shattering 60 inches (or 152.4 cm) of rain over some parts of Texas (Vox.com 2018). Over the course of the storm, it's estimated 24 trillion to 34 trillion gallons of water fell in the area. And the weight of that water was so heavy, it actually depressed the earth more than half an inch in some spots, according to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

### The Mechanism of Greenhouse Effect



Source: Pixabay

Climate change is a deeply controversial subject, despite decades of scientific research and a high degree of scientific consensus that supports its existence. For example, according to NASA scientists, 2013 tied with 2009

and 2006 as the seventh-warmest year since 1880, continuing the overall trend of increasing worldwide temperatures (NASA 2014). One effect of climate change is, as mentioned above, more extreme weather. There are increasingly more record-breaking weather phenomena, from the number of Category 4 hurricanes to the amount of snowfall in a given winter. These extremes, while they make for dramatic television coverage, can cause immeasurable damage to crops, property, and even lives.

So why is there a controversy? The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) recognizes the existence of climate change. So do nearly 200 countries that signed the **Kyoto Protocol** in 1992, a document intended to engage countries in voluntary actions to limit the activity that leads to climate change. (The United States was not one of the 200 nations committed to this initiative to reduce environmental damage, and its refusal to sign continues to be a source of contention.)

In 2015, however, the United States joined the **Paris Agreement**, an international agreement aimed at reducing carbon emissions. The U.S., which took the lead in negotiating the deal, signed onto the agreement in April 2016, along with China, the European Union and 171 other nations. China and the U.S. account for nearly 40% of global carbon emissions (CBS News 2017).

But then again, President Trump announced the U.S. will withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Trump repeatedly called climate change a "hoax" during the presidential campaign. As president, he has taken significant steps to roll back Mr. Obama's climate change agenda, saying the Paris Agreement harms U.S. businesses and workers "to the exclusive benefit of other countries."

World systems analysis suggests that while core nations (like the U.S., Western Europe, and Japan) were, historically, the greatest source of greenhouse gases (CO<sub>2</sub>), they have now evolved into postindustrial societies. Industrialized semi-peripheral and peripheral nations are releasing increasing quantities of carbon emissions. The core nations, now post-industrial and less dependent on greenhouse-gas-causing industries, wish to enact strict protocols regarding the causes of global warming, but the semi-peripheral and peripheral nations rightly point out that they only want the

same economic chance to evolve their economies. Since they were unduly affected by the progress of core nations, if the core nations now insist on "green" policies, they should pay offsets or subsidies of some kind. There are no easy answers to this conflict. It may well not be "fair" that the core nations benefited from ignorance during their industrial boom.

The international community continues to work toward a way to manage climate change. During the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the United States agreed to fund global climate change programs. In September 2010, President Obama announced the Global Climate Change Initiative (GCCI) as part of his administration's Global Development Policy. The GCCI is a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding program intended to improve the economic and environmental sustainability of peripheral and semi-peripheral countries by encouraging the use of alternative, low-carbon, energy sources with financial incentives. Programming is organized around three pillars: (1) climate change adaptation, (2) clean energy, and (3) sustainable landscapes (Troilo 2012).

## **Pollution**

**Pollution** describes what happens when contaminants are introduced into an environment (water, air, land) at levels that are damaging. Environments can often sustain a limited amount of contaminants without marked change, and water, air, and soil can "heal" themselves to a certain degree. However, once contaminant levels reach a certain point, the results can be catastrophic.

## **Water**

Look at your watch. Wait thirty seconds. In that time, two children have died from lack of access to clean drinking water. Access to safe water is one of the most basic human needs, but nonetheless it is woefully out of reach for millions of people on the planet. Many of the major diseases that peripheral nations battle, such as diarrhea, cholera, and typhoid, are caused

by contaminated water. The situation is only getting more dire as the global population increases. Water is a key resource battleground in the twenty-first century.

Although 70% of earth is made of water, giant corporations mostly use this natural resource for their own profits rather than for sustenance of life. For example, it takes 2.5 liters of water to produce 1 liter of Coca-Cola; for every 1 liter of Coke, 1.5 liters of water are lost. The company and its bottlers use about 300 billion liters of water a year, often in locations that are short of usable water (Blanchard 2007).

As a consequence of population concentrations, water close to human settlements is frequently polluted with untreated or partially treated human waste (sewage), chemicals, radioactivity, and levels of heat sufficient to create large “dead zones” incapable of supporting aquatic life. The methods of food production used by many core nations rely on liberal doses of nitrogen and pesticides, which end up back in the water supply. In some cases, water pollution affects the quality of the aquatic life consumed by water and land animals. Since humans consume at all levels of the food chain, we consume the carcinogen (sustenance that can cause cancer).

## Air

China’s fast-growing economy and burgeoning industry have translated into notoriously poor air quality. Smog hangs heavily over the major cities, sometimes grounding aircraft that cannot navigate through it. Pedestrians and cyclists wear air-filter masks to protect themselves. In Beijing, citizens are skeptical that the government-issued daily pollution ratings are trustworthy. Increasingly, they are taking their own pollution measurements in the hopes that accurate information will galvanize others to action. Given that some days they can barely see down the street, they hope action comes soon (Papenfuss 2011).

Humanity, with its growing numbers, use of fossil fuels (oil), and increasingly urbanized society, is putting too much stress on the earth’s atmosphere. The amount of air pollution varies from locale to locale, and

you may be more personally affected than you realize. How often do you check air quality reports before leaving your house? Depending on where you live, this question can sound utterly strange or like an everyday matter. Along with oxygen, most of the time we are also breathing in soot, hydrocarbons, carbon, nitrogen, and sulfur oxides.

Much of the pollution in the air comes from human activity. How many college students move their cars across campus at least once a day? Who checks the environmental report card on how many pollutants each company throws into the air before purchasing a cell phone? Many of us are guilty of taking our environment for granted without concern for how everyday decisions add up to a long-term global problem. How many minor adjustments can you think of, like walking instead of driving, that would reduce your overall carbon footprint?

Remember the “tragedy of the commons.” Each of us is affected by air pollution. But like the herder who adds one more head of cattle to realize the benefits of owning more cows but who does not have to pay the price of the overgrazed land, we take the benefit of driving or buying the latest cell phones without worrying about the end result. Air pollution accumulates in the body, much like the effects of smoking cigarettes accumulate over time, leading to more chronic illnesses. And in addition to directly affecting human health, air pollution affects crop quality as well as heating and cooling costs. In other words, we all pay a lot more than the price at the pump when we fill up our tank with gas.

## Land

You might have read *The Grapes of Wrath* in English class at some point in time. Steinbeck’s tale of the Joads, driven out of their home by the Dust Bowl, is still playing out today. In China, as in Depression-era Oklahoma, over-tilling soil in an attempt to expand agriculture has resulted in the disappearance of large patches of topsoil.

Soil erosion and desertification are just two of the many forms of soil pollution. In addition, all the chemicals and pollutants that harm our water

supplies can also leach into soil with similar effects. Brown zones where nothing can grow are common results of soil pollution. One demand the population boom makes on the planet is a requirement for more food to be produced.

The so-called “Green Revolution” in the 1960s started owing to chemists and world aid organizations working together to bring modern farming methods to peripheral countries. The revolution was based on chemical fertilizer, pesticides, and so on. This successfully helped increase agricultural production worldwide. But as time has gone on, these areas have fallen into even more difficult contamination, which was exported worldwide.

Dredging certain beaches in an attempt to save valuable beachfront property from coastal erosion has resulted in greater storm impact on shorelines, and damage to beach ecosystems (Turneffe Atoll Trust 2008). These dredging projects have damaged reefs, sea grass beds, and shorelines and can kill off large swaths of marine life. Ultimately, this damage threatens local fisheries, tourism, and other parts of the local economy.

## **Garbage**



Where should garbage go  
when you've run out of  
room? This is a question  
that is increasingly

pressing the planet.  
(Photo courtesy of Kevin Krejci/flickr)

Garbage creation and control are major issues faced worldwide. We buy things, use them, and/or throw them away. There are two primary means of waste disposal: landfill (to bury it) and incineration (to burn it). But neither is a good choice for some types of garbage, such as Styrofoam and plastics.

Roughly one third of the food produced in the world for human consumption every year--approximately 1.3 billion tonnes--gets lost or wasted (fao.org 2019). On the other hand, it is estimated that 36 million people died from starvation in 2017 (The Borgen Project 2017). That is, one person dies of hunger every second. Of these 36 million people, children are especially vulnerable. Every minute, 12 children under the age of five die of hunger.

### E-Waste

Electronic waste, or e-waste, is one of the fastest growing and the most dangerous segments of garbage. **E-waste** is the name for obsolete, broken, and worn-out electronics—from computers to mobile phones to televisions. The challenge is that these products, which are multiplying at alarming rates thanks in part to **planned obsolescence** (see Ch. 10, Media and Technology), have toxic chemicals and precious metals in them, a dangerous combination.

So where do they go? Many companies ship their e-waste to peripheral nations in Africa and Asia to be “recycled.” While they are recycled, the result is not exactly clean. In fact, it is dangerous. Overseas, nonetheless, without the environmental regulation, e-waste dumps become a kind of boom town for entrepreneurs. In their hunt, their workers are exposed to deadly toxins.

Governments are beginning to take notice of the impending disaster, and the European Union, as well as the state of California, put stricter regulations in place. These regulations both limit the amount of toxins allowed in electronics and address the issue of end-of-life recycling. But not surprisingly, corporations, while insisting they are greening their process, often fight stricter regulations. Meanwhile, many environmental groups, including the activist group Greenpeace, have taken up the cause. Greenpeace states that it is working to get companies to:

1. measure and reduce emissions with energy efficiency, renewable energy, and energy policy advocacy
2. make greener, efficient, longer lasting products that are free of hazardous substance
3. reduce environmental impacts throughout company operations, from choosing production materials and energy sources right through to establishing global take-back programs for old products (Greenpeace 2011).

Greenpeace produces annual ratings of how well companies are meeting these goals so consumers can see how brands stack up. For instance, Apple moved from ranking fourth overall to sixth overall from 2011 to 2012. The hope is that consumers will vote with their wallets, and the greener companies will be rewarded.

## **Toxic and Radioactive Waste**

Radioactivity is a form of fatal air pollution. Nuclear power plants are looked upon as a danger to the environment and to all kinds of living things including, of course, people. They accumulate nuclear waste, which they must then keep track of long term and ultimately figure out how to store the toxic waste material without damaging the environment or putting future generations at risk. Certain radioactive elements (such as plutonium-239) will remain hazardous to humans and other creatures for hundreds of thousands of years.

What's been termed as "The Great East Japan Earthquake" hit on March 11, 2011 (CBC News 2016). The 9.0-magnitude earthquake struck off the northeastern coast of Japan's main island, and triggered a powerful tsunami. The tsunami brought 15-metre (or 49-feet) waves (about a 5-story building high) to Japan's east coast, destroying, among others, three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant and releasing radioactive material into the air (see below).



The Fukushima nuclear power plants damaged by the monstrous tsunami in 2011, leaking radioactivity into the air, the water, and the land. (Photo courtesy of Digital Globe)

The earthquake and tsunami together caused almost 16,000 deaths, as well as 6,000 people injured and 2,500 still missing. For leaking radioactivity, more than 470,000 people were ordered to leave their homes. Seven years after, many of them are still barred from returning to their homes inside the "exclusion zone," while others opted to resettle elsewhere.

In the immediate aftermath of the nuclear power plants accidents, Japan idled all 54 of its nuclear plants. Now, though, five of them are back online while many more may be on the way (Forbes 2017). Prime Minister Shinzo

Abe, who is pro-business, has said that nuclear power plants are safe. The Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) is expected to get approval from the government to restart the plants.

What is the public reaction to this? It is negative, angrily. According to a survey taken in 2016, indeed, 57% of the public opposed restarting existing nuclear power plants even if they satisfied new regulatory standards, and 73% demanded a phaseout of nuclear power, with 14% urging an immediate shutdown of all nuclear plants (The Conversation 2017). However, we need to know that attitudes (opinions) and behaviors (voting patterns) are not the same. During elections, after all, many of them choose the safer way, that is, the party in power. Alas...



Oil on the gulf shore beaches caused great destruction, killing marine and land animals and crippling local business. (Photo courtesy of AV8ter/flickr)

**Note:**

### The Fire Burns On: Centralia, Pennsylvania

There used to be a place called Centralia, Pennsylvania. The town incorporated in the 1860s and once had several thousand residents, largely coal workers. But the story of its demise begins a century later in 1962. That year, a trash-burning fire was lit in the pit of the old abandoned coal mine outside of town. The fire moved down the mineshaft and ignited a vein of coal. It is still burning.

For more than twenty years, people tried to extinguish the underground fire, but no matter what they did, it returned. There was little government action, and people had to abandon their homes as toxic gases engulfed the area and sinkholes developed. The situation drew national attention when the ground collapsed under twelve-year-old Todd Domboski in 1981. Todd was in his yard when a sinkhole four feet wide and 150 feet deep opened beneath him. He clung to exposed tree roots and saved his life; if he had fallen a few feet farther, the heat or carbon monoxide would have killed him instantly.

In 1983, engineers studying the fire concluded that it could burn for another century or more and could spread over nearly 4,000 acres. At this point, the government offered to buy out the town's residents and wanted them to relocate to nearby towns. A few determined Centralians refused to leave, even though the government bought their homes, and they are the only ones who remain. In one field, signs warn people to enter at their own risk, because the ground is hot and unstable. And the fire burns on (DeKok 1986).

## Environmental Racism

**Environmental racism** refers to the way in which minority neighborhoods are burdened with a disproportionate volume of hazards, including toxic waste facilities, garbage dumps, and other sources of environmental pollution. All around the world, minority groups bear a greater burden of the health problems through higher exposure to waste and pollution. This can occur in workplaces where regulations are loose, such as sweatshops.

Research indicates, for example, that it pervades all aspects of African Americans' lives: environmentally unsound housing, schools with asbestos problems, facilities and playgrounds with lead paint. (Asbestos is a material used for building construction as it absorbs sound, insulates heat, and so on. But as scientists found it can cause cancer, many countries decided to restrict its usage by the 1980s. The the World Trade Center buildings were built in 1973 and they contain Asbestos.)

A twenty-year comparative sociological study reported "race to be more important than socioeconomic status in predicting the location of the nation's commercial hazardous waste facilities" (Bullard et al. 2007). This research found, among others, that African American children are five times more likely to have lead poisoning than their Caucasian counterparts, and that a disproportionate number of people of color reside in areas with hazardous waste facilities. Sociologists also examine if environmental racism is observed in the government reactions to natural disasters, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, heatwaves, and so on.

In September, 2017, Hurricane Maria heavily destroyed Puerto Rico, most notably the infrastructure, such as electricity, clean water, and so on. As the blackout dragged on and health care remained strained for months (!), it is estimated that near 3,000 people died in this situation--while the government refused to acknowledge this extraordinary toll (Vox.com 2018).

### **Dakota Access Pipeline**



Photo courtesy of Nightly News: NBCNEWS.

The pipeline is to be built by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners and is designed to transport as many as 570,000 barrels of crude oil daily from North Dakota to Illinois (Time 2016). The nearly \$4 billion project called the **Dakota Access Pipeline** was first proposed in 2014 with an anticipated completion in 2016. The Standing Rock Sioux, a tribe of around 10,000 Native Americans, is protesting the project whose pipe would travel underneath not only the Missouri River, the primary drinking water source for them, but also their sacred burial ground.

As a reaction to the protest, North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple has called in the National Guard (Time 2016). More than 140 people were arrested so far. The Obama administration temporarily blocked construction on the project, but a federal court intervened to allow the project to proceed. President Obama has taken no additional steps and has said nothing officially about the pipeline. Backed by the Nebraska regulators' decision to approve the pipeline, President Trump has happily handed the company a federal permit for its project, which according to him will lower fuel prices, boost national security, and bring jobs (Fortune 2017).

Contrary to the regulators' decision, however, the Dakota Access pipeline leaked, at least five times in 2017 (The Intercept 2018). According to federal regulators, though, no wildlife or no water was impacted. Most of

the system leaks were considered minor by state and federal monitors. But the fact is that the pipelines leak. Isn't this similar to the Japanese government's attitude toward its nuclear power plants, which got damaged and leaked radioactivity but are nonetheless approved to run again?

Why does environmental racism exist? The reason is simple. Those with resources can raise money and public attention to ensure that their projects are not just safe but also important. This leads to an inequitable distribution of environmental burdens. Another method of keeping this inequity alive is NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) protests by relatively wealthy people. Chemical plants, airports, landfills, and other corporate projects are often blocked by NIMBY protests. Hence, unfavorable projects are moved closer to those who have fewer power.

## Summary

The area of environmental sociology is growing as extreme weather patterns and concerns over climate change increase. Human activity leads to pollution of soil, water, and air, compromising the health of the entire food chain. While everyone is at risk, poor and disadvantaged neighborhoods and nations bear a greater burden of the planet's pollution, a dynamic known as environmental racism.

## Further Research

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Visit the Cleanups in My Community web site:  
[http://openstaxcollege.org/l/community\\_cleanup](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/community_cleanup) to see where environmental hazards have been identified in your backyard, and what is being done about them.

What is your carbon footprint? Find out using the carbon footprint calculator at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/carbon\\_footprint\\_calculator](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/carbon_footprint_calculator)

Find out more about greening the electronics process by looking at Greenpeace's guide: [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/greenpeace\\_electronics](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/greenpeace_electronics)

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## Glossary

climate change

long-term shifts in temperature and climate due to human activity

environmental racism

the burdening of economically and socially disadvantaged communities with a disproportionate share of environmental hazards

environmental sociology

the sociological subfield that addresses the relationship between humans and the environment

e-waste

the disposal of broken, obsolete, and worn-out electronics

NIMBY

“Not In My Back Yard,” the tendency of people to protest poor environmental practices when those practices will affect them directly

pollution

the introduction of contaminants into an environment at levels that are damaging